September

TWO GUN STORIES

NOW 15¢

ALL STORIES COMPLETE AND ILLUSTRATED

THE CABRESTO KID
By S. OMAR BARKER

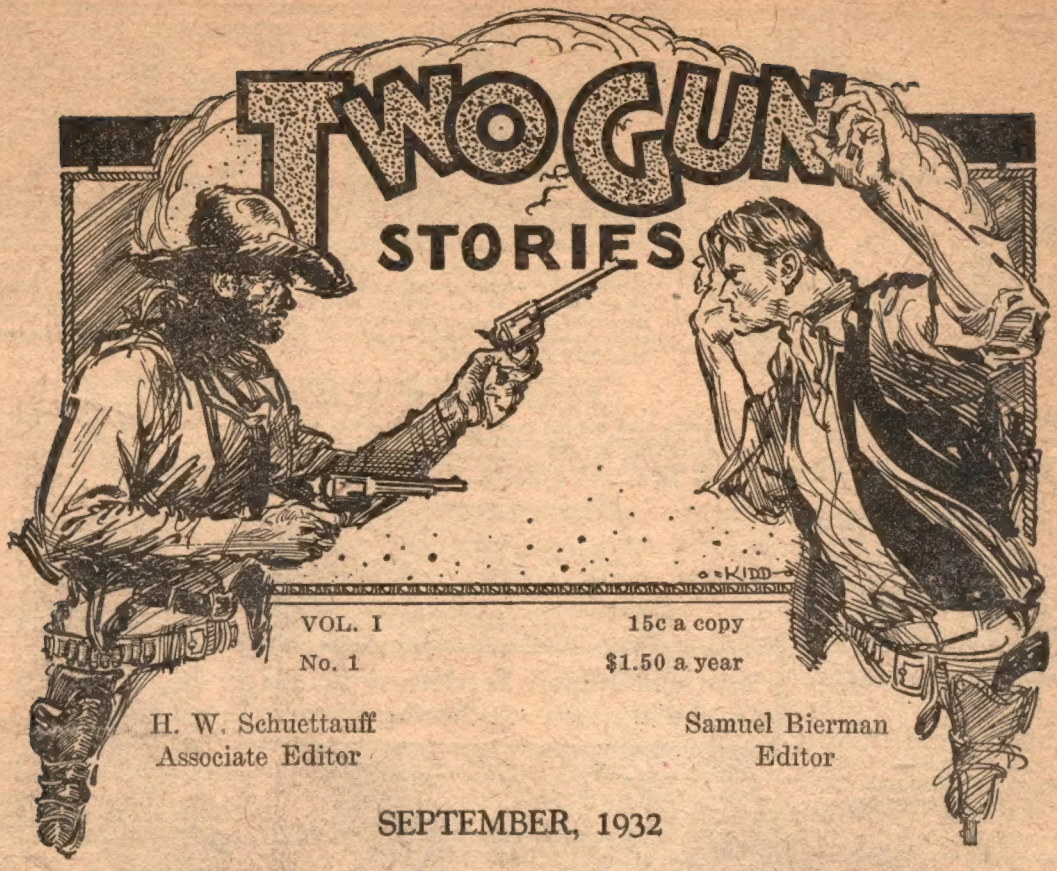
ALSO STORIES BY
JOHN COLOHAN
ARCHIE JOSCELYN
SEABURN BROWN
AND OTHERS

GREY GHOST
A RIP-ROARIN' RODEO STORY
By CHAS. ROY COX

THE YUMA KID RIDES
By WILTON WEST

Missing Page

Inside front cover



VOL. I 15c a copy
No. 1 $1.50 a year

H. W. Schuettauff
Associate Editor

Samuel Bierman
Editor

SEPTEMBER, 1932

The Gray Ghost ..... Chas. Roy Cox 3
A Complete Novelette

The Cabresto Kid ..... S. Omar Barker 27
A Short Story

Two Of A Kind ..... James H. Hull 39
A Short Story

The Yuma Kid Rides ..... Wilton West 45
A Short Story

The Law Round-up ..... John Colohan 57
A Complete Novelette

Feud Fever ..... C. B. Yorke 77
A Short Story

The Law And The Profits ..... Archie Joscelyn 87
A Short Story

Horse Outfits ..... E. W. Thistlethwaite 96
An Article

The Frozen Gods ..... Jack Bertin 102
A Short Story

Education—Arizona Brand ..... Seaburn Brown 115
A Short Story

Cover design by Eric Lundgren

Published monthly by the Metropolitan Publishers, Inc., 537 So. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill. Copyright, 1932, Metropolitan Publishers, Inc. Second class entry applied for at the postoffice at Chicago, Ill. Price 15 cents a copy; $1.50 a year in the United States and possessions; foreign postage 50 cents additional. Printed in U. S. A. Back numbers cannot be furnished with subscriptions. All manuscripts will be given due consideration but this magazine assumes no responsibility for their safety. Return envelope and sufficient postage should accompany all material submitted.

Secret Sins

Bitter tears and years of regret can never wipe out the Greatest Sin. Should every woman pay the terrible price for a short moment's happiness? Ruined homes—lovers and sweethearts parted—married life wrecked—divorce—scandal—sins of the parents inherited by their children—all the horrible results of IGNORANCE of the most important part of life—SEX.

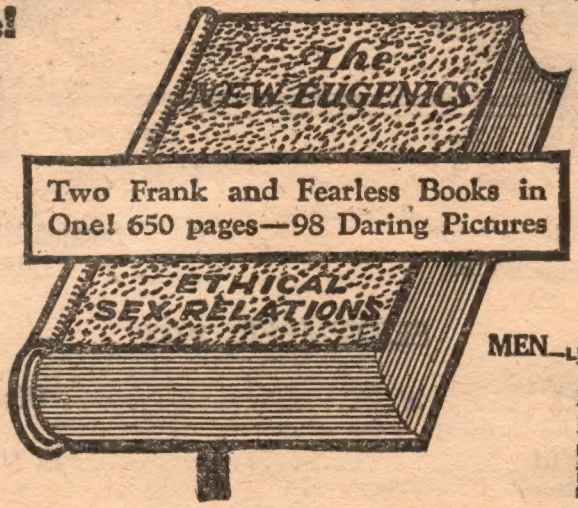
THE SIN REVEALED!

Banish false modesty! Learn the truth from this frank, fearless book "The New Eugenics" Everything about sex explained in simple understandable language. No "Beating about the bush"—each fact told straight from the shoulder. Part II "The Parents Medical Counselor"—no home should be without this valuable information—explains the human body—its functions, its ills, its remedies. Both parts of this 650 page book fully illustrated $2.95

There Is No Darkness But Ignorance!

THIS BOOK FEARLESSLY TELLS ABOUT:

- Twilight Sleep—Easy Childbirth.
- Sex Excesses.
- Are Children Always Desirable?
- The Crime of Abortion.
- Quarreling and Making Up.
- Should Husbands Occupy Separate Beds.
- Concerning Love.
- Impotence and Sex Weakness.
- How Babies are Born.
- Family Health Guide.
- The Mystery of Twins.
- Nursing.
- Valuable Remedies for Women's Diseases.
- Teaching Children Sex.



The following chapters also included

READ THESE AIDS TO A HAPPY SEX LIFE
- Guide to Love.
- The Meaning of Sex.
- The Dangers of Petting.
- How To Get Your Man.
- What To Allow a Lover To Do.
- Essentials of Happy Marriage.
- Sex Attraction.
- Physical and Spiritual Love.
- Love Making and its Dangers.
- How To Pick a Husband.
- Intimate Personal Hygiene.
- Secrets of the Honeymoon.

MEN—LEARN THESE SEX SECRETS
- The Human Body
- Venereal Diseases.
- How To Build Virility.
- The Truth About Masturbation.
- Hygienic Precautions.
- The Sexual Embrace.
- How To Gain Greater Delight.
- Joys of Perfect Mating.
- How To Attract Women.
- Sex Health and Prevention.

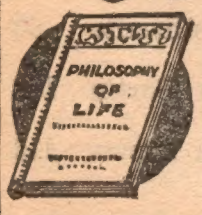
650 Pages of Everything About Life and Sex--Read and learn the real truth!

OVER 300,000 COPIES OF THIS DARING BOOK SOLD!

SPECIAL FREE OFFER-

to readers of this magazine for a limited time only.

Free!



This instructive, outspoken book GIVEN WITHOUT COST to all who order "The New Eugenics." Only one to a purchaser.

Learn all about the construction and functions of the human male and female body. Thrilling Sex Facts FREE.

A Lifetime of experience—The intimate facts of Sex told freely for the first time. If you don't think this is the greatest value you ever received for your money—WE WILL REFUND THE ENTIRE PURCHASE PRICE. Face the True Facts about Sex and Life fearlessly—sincerely and scientifically—this splendid book—650 pages full of solid fact with 98 illustrations costs only $2.95 Now. Fill out and mail the coupon for your copy TODAY!

Two Books In One

WAS $5.00 Reduced to $2.95

NOTE — This book on Sex, Life and Health will not be sold to Minors — state your age when ordering!

Pioneer Publ. Co., 110 West 40 St., Dept. P. 98, New York.

Gentlemen—Kindly send me "The New Eugenics" [650 pages] in a plain wrapper. I will pay the postman $2.95 [plus postage] on delivery. [You will also send me, Free of Charge, your book "The Philosophy of Life."]

Name .....

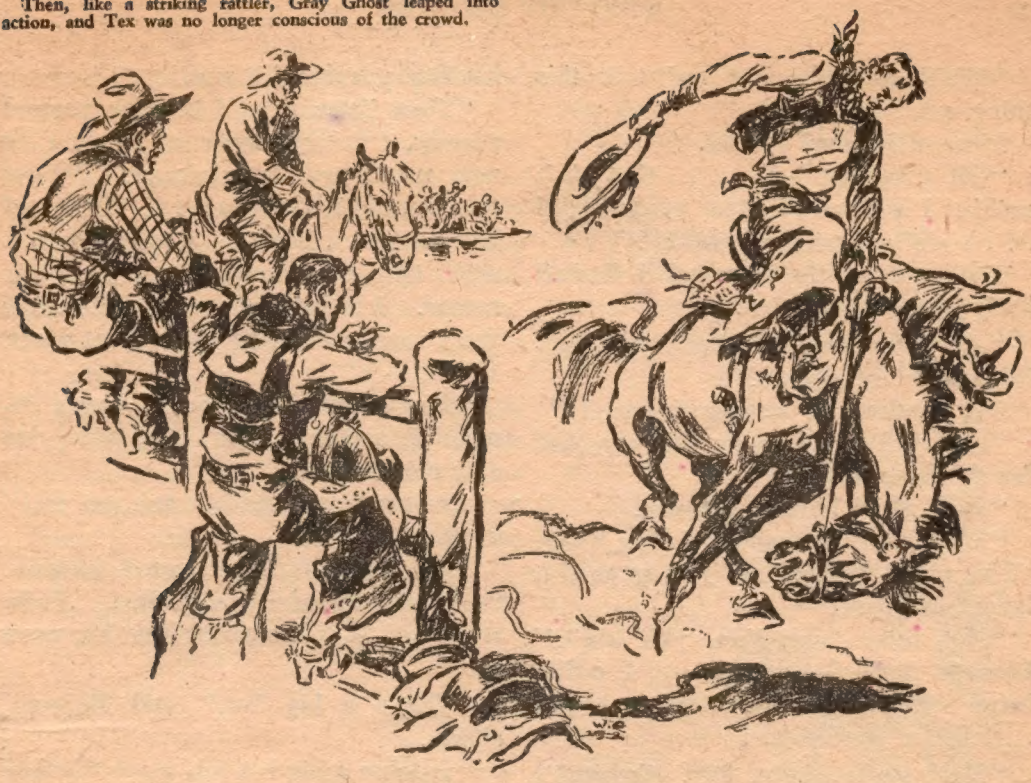
Address .....

Age..... Orders from Foreign Countries must be accompanied by Express or Money Order for $3.45.

Edition Limited. Clip Coupon and Mail Today.

PIONEER PUBLISHING CO.
110 West 40th Street, Dept. P-98 New York, N. Y.

Then, like a striking rattler, Gray Ghost leaped into action, and Tex was no longer conscious of the crowd.



The Gray Ghost

A Complete Novelette

BY CHAS. ROY COX

"I'M TELLIN' yuh, Lewis, thar ain't room fer both o' us in th' Black Mustang Hills!" Jim Lewis, the lean, grizzled, fighting boss of the Diamond E fixed the beefy-faced speaker with a cold, gray eye.

"Then yuh better git out, Blossom!" he said, drily.

A quick silence fell over the group gathered in the general store at Fargo Flat. Every man in the crowd had long been aware of the growing bitterness between the two old ranchers; here at last the thing had been forced into the open.

"Mebbe it'll be me thet goes, an' mebbe it won't!" Insolence, tinged with venom, hardened Bill Blossom's angry retort. "But by thunder, one o' us is goin'!"

Lewis nodded gravely.

"I reckon yuh're plumb correct, Bill. Our cattle's been crowdin' each other o' late fer grass. Sooner or later, thar'll be trouble."

"An' damn apt tuh be sooner," growled Blossom. "I'll either buy yuh out . . . . or I'll sell."

Lewis gave a quick glance about the circle of listening men.

"We'll git tuhgether an' talk this thing out," he agreed.

Blossom laughed shortly.

"Git tuhgether hell. . . . . that ain't nothin' I got tuh say thet needs hidin' . . . I ain't ashamed o' nothin'."

The owner of the Diamond E flushed hotly at the insinuation.

"All right then. . . what's yore sellin' price?" he demanded.

"A hundred an' twenty thousand!"

"An' yuh stand ready tuh pay that fer th' Diamond E?"

"Hell, no!" boomed Blossom.

"Why not?" demanded Lewis, hotly. "I've got more land an' just as good a layout as yores!"

"Not by a long shot, yuh ain't," Blossom derided insolently. "I got a better outfit every way. . . better horses . . . better cowhands. . ."

"Hold on a shake, Bill Blossom!" roared Lewis. "I've got boys on my payroll thet don't play second fiddle in any company. Thar's Casper, now, th'..."

"Bah!" sneered Blossom. "I'll bet yuh thet—"

"Not with me yuh won't," Lewis cut in. "I never bet."

"Yeah, I know yuh ain't got th' nerve tuh call a bet," taunted Blossom. "If yuh had, I'd play yuh one hand o' stud tuh see who keeps th' Hills!"

Lewis' weathered face blazed under the insult.

"I admit I ain't no tinhorn card sharp," he snapped. "Nor I ain't dippy over no two-bit wagers, either. But th' man don't live thet kin say my nerve ain't good!"

A derisive chuckle rattled from between Blossom's thick lips.

"By thunder, Lewis, we'll see. Yuh claim yore Diamond E punchers tuh be as good as my TZ boys, but yuh don't dast back 'em with a damn thing but cheap talk. Air yuh scared tuh bet?"

"No, damn yuh!" thundered Lewis, his face purple with wrath.

"Then listen here," Blossom pressed eagerly, "th' stampede at Shell City next month will be a ripper. Biggest this country's ever had. . . . droves o' bad hosses. . . herds o' spooky steers... over two thousand dollars in prize money. I'll bet yuh my boys'll draw down more cash in th' finals than yores. I'll bet—"

"How much'll yuh bet?" Lewis demanded suddenly, his face grim, his eyes cold as stone.

"As much as yuh dare tuh put up!" Blossom blustered.

"All right," Lewis cried harshly. "I'll bet yuh th' Diamond E. . . . lock, stock an' barrel, against the TZ, even up!"

"Thet's a big bet," said Blossom, slowly.

"It takes a big bet tuh prove whether a man's yella or not," Lewis cried passionately.

Bill Blossom rose from his chair.

"I'll take yore bet, Jim Lewis," he agreed, eagerly, a sly smile jerking at the corners of his mouth, "but yuh'll have tuh agree tuh one thing. . . yuh'll have tuh let me hire one more rider tuh make up fer him." He jerked his head toward a slim, dark-faced youth who stood just inside the doorway listening in silence to the talk.

"What's Paul got tuh do with it?" demanded Lewis.

"He's a new hand out yore way," the TZ owner answered, bluntly. "I don't know a thing about him. . . . fer all I know he may be some champ rider yuh hired when yuh first made up yore mind tuh lay this bet!"

Lewis flushed angrily at the other's words. In them, he saw Blossom's hidden suggestion that the bet had been a scheme of his to obtain the TZ layout by trickery.

"Yuh know damn well that this here

rider ain't none other'n Paul Bird, my nephew, thet come up here from Texas tuh jine up with me a month ago," he exclaimed wrathfully. "I told yuh two-three months ago I was expectin' him. But ef yuh want a new man, I'll meet yuh half way. . . we'll put a clause in th' bet that each one o' us kin hire one new man. . . not countin' Paul."

So great was his anger, that Lewis failed to note the gleam of triumph that flashed for a second in the beady little eyes of Bill Blossom.

"Seems tuh me yuh did say somethin' about yore nephew a-comin' up here," admitted the owner of the TZ. "I reckon we better put this deal down on paper, along with the bills of sale," he went on, eagerly. "We'll file 'em with a reliable party. . . . I don't want no backin' out on this deal."

"Thar'll be no backin' out on my part," snapped Lewis. "Git out yore pen and papers. . . we'll put this thing down in black and white, right now."

A FEW moments later, rough papers had been drawn up, signed by both men, also by proper witnesses, and filed for safekeeping with the storekeeper.

Blossom was grinning openly when Lewis left the store a short time later, Paul Bird trailing at his heels. There was a certain, indefinable something in the man's bearing which suggested that he was already the owner of the Diamond E. His contemptuous satisfaction served as fuel to Jim Lewis' anger as he stamped out.

"Pardon me, suh!"

The voice was soft and even as it reached Jim's ears. He paused with a hand on the door of his touring car, and turned to find himself looking into a pair of steady, gray eyes set in a lean, brown face. He remembered that he had noticed the young stranger in the store while the bet was being made.

He had attracted the attention of Jim Lewis because of all the men in the room, he was the only one who seemed to take no interest in what was going on. He had spent the whole time minding his own business. . . which had, at the time, consisted of consuming a quart can of yellow cling peaches.

Standing, the youth proved to be far taller than he had looked while sitting. There was an inch or two more than six feet of him, and from the crown of his battered hat to the soles of his well-worn boots, there was an air of competence about him.

"Wal?" grunted the owner of the Diamond E.

"Jest a bit ago," said the stranger, mildly, "I got th' idee yuh aimed tuh hire a new hand. Less yuh got other plans, I'm him!"

"Who says so?"

The hint of a smile jerked at the corners of the stranger's mouth.

"If yuh do. . . that'll make two of us," he drawled.

In spite of himself, the grizzled old rancher was forced to smile in return. There was something about the light that danced in the youth's gray eyes that warmed the cockles of his heart.

"Who air yuh?"

"I'll answer if yuh call fer Tex Sisterson."

"Kin yuh ride?"

"Consid'able."

Something in that lazy drawl appealed to Jim Lewis.

"Git in," he said, shortly. "We'll give yuh a try."

"I'll ride out. . . . . I got my own hoss."

"Know th' way?"

"Reckon I'll find it," retorted the man who agreed to answer to the name of Tex Sisterson.

Once away from Fargo Flat, Jim Lewis' wrath cooled to a large extent.

He began to realize the importance of the thing he had been tricked into.

"Mighty big bet yuh laid out," said Paul Bird, finally, breaking a silence that had lasted for five miles.

Lewis nodded grimly.

"I was a fool tuh let him herd me intuh it. But we ain't lost th' Diamond E yet, Paul. I'll admit that Blossom's got some clever cowhands. . . . such as Pangot. . . but so have we. Casper is th' best bronk rider in th' state. . . . made th' finals at Pendleton two years ago. Fer th' past five seasons, Jerry Hall's been in th' money every year at Miles City, in th' bulldoggin'. Those two old timers air hard tuh beat. . . . then thar's Iverson, th' slickest roper thet ever twirled a noose."

The two rode on in silence for a time, then Lewis added:

"Yuh're a top hand yoreself, Paul, when it comes tuh stickin' a twister. . . an' yuh got reason tuh ride, too. . . th' Diamond E will fall tuh yuh some day, son."

"It's fer now we got tuh plan. . . now that stranger yuh hired. . ."

"Wal, what about him?"

"Nothin', I guess," Bird shrugged. "Only, who is he? How do yuh know he ain't playin' Bill Blossom's game?"

"Aw shucks," Lewis expostulated. But he was still thinking of it when they drove up to the ranchhouse.

Long after the rest of the establishment had gone to bed that night, the owner of the Diamond E paced his living room floor, a cigar champing in his teeth, deep lines of worry across his face. Somehow, the hand of foreboding lay heavy upon him.

The rancher was sixty. He had never married, and for thirty years, the Diamond E had been his only love. He had fought Indians while locating it, combatted white desperadoes to hold it. More than one night-riding rustler had fallen before his 30:30 Winchester before he had cleaned the range of this scourge. In spite of many drawbacks, the Diamond E had prospered until Bill Blossom established the TZ twenty miles to the east. From that time on, the blustering, scheming range hog had been a constant menace. And now, barely a month after the one son of Lewis' only sister had come to join him, his rashness bade fair to lose everything for them both. Jim ceased his pacing to fling himself into a chair, where he buried his face in his hands.

What had he done? Blundered like a fool into Blossom's trap? Presented his enemy with the Diamond E?. . . .

CHAPTER II

SIX COWBOYS, puffing leisurely at cigarettes, lounged in the Diamond E bunkhouse. The evening was cloudy and damp, the hour late. Such talk as passed among them was that of men who are but passing

the time while they wait.

Casper, a broad-shouldered, long-legged puncher, began tugging at his boots.

"I'm goin' tuh turn in," he remarked. "Looks like Dwight won't show up tonight."

"I look fer him 'bout eleven," Iverson predicted. "He's a early riser an' a hard rider. More'n once I've known him tuh cover th' Shell City trail 'tween sun-up an' midnight."

"What hoss is he ridin'?" demanded Casper.

"Th' steel gray. . . Rockabye."

"I'll set a bit longer," Casper decided. "Let's stir up a game o' blackjack tuh kill time."

They gathered around the plank table. Casper, Iverson, Chinook, Jerry Hall, and Paul Bird, who had come down from the ranchhouse to await the coming of Dwight.

Sisterson, the new rider, declined the card game with a shake of his head.

"Reckon I'll just set and watch, gents," he said softly.

The men about the table accepted his refusal without comment. They liked the lean, able stranger, the older men even more than the youngsters, because he seldom spoke. There was nothing unfriendly about his silence; he seemed to be one of those rare individuals, who, without speaking, can still be part of a a group.

They realized, too, that there were many men in the wide sweep of the cow country who travel fast and light, and with whom silence is a thing much to be desired.

Lewis had a hobby of keeping at his ranch, only such cowboys who were expert in their calling. To be retained on the Diamond E spread was considered high honor among range riders. Any who failed to measure up to the Diamond E standard were soon discharged.

The group about the table was a big powerful, rangy crew. Each individual member was as efficient as he looked, too. . . and it was well. . . for on the skill of those men gathered there, Lewis had wagered all that a lifetime of toil had gained him.

Because of this extraordinary wager, Dwight had ridden the long trail to Shell City, determined to learn what competition his comrades must meet. The others were awaiting his return.

Outside, the wind strengthened and gusts of rain lashed the windows. Without warning, the door swung open and Dwight entered, mud-splashed and dripping. In a jiffy the cards were flung aside, and the players turned to welcome the tired messenger.

Dwight was older by ten years than any man in the bunkhouse. His hair was streaked with gray, and his face was blotched and wrinkled. . . but he still retained the rider's wiry, supple form.

"How do things stack up, old timer?" yelled Iverson.

Dwight straightened impressively before he answered.

"Boys, I've seen some rodeos in my time, but I believe these coming three days at Shell City will have 'em all skinned forty ways. The old town ain't like she was before. The local cattlemen didn't stop for expense when they planned this season's program. They're aimin' tuh put on a Stampede that'll never be forgot."

"What kind o' purses?" put in Chinook.

"Big. . . fer Shell City. First at saddle bronk ridin' is three hundred dollars. Bulldogging the same. Calf ropin' pays two hundred. Th' cowpony race, relay race, steer ridin', and surcingle bronc ridin' offer a hundred apiece. There's considerable day money put up too."

"Sounds good tuh me," said Paul Bird.

"The Indians have been given permission to leave the Blue Rock Reservation," Dwight went on, "and there's a thousand of them on the way to the big event, bringing a long string of horses and the best all-round cowboys and riders in the Reservation country. Pangot is riding for Blossom again this year, and they say he is better than ever. And Slim Hanley, bronk-peeling champion from Pendleton, will be there, certain."

"Reckon even Slim Hanley can't show Casper much," said Iverson, quickly.

"Reckon not!" agreed Chinook. But the bronco buster looked doubtful.

"Boys, I know Lewis rates me mighty high," he said, slowly. "But I don't feel any too sure. I'm gettin old to take the jolts like some o' th' younger riders. And I've hit too hard a gait to last forever. Fellers, I dread this contest considerable."

"Aw, hell, Casper, there ain't a twister livin' that kin ride with yuh," Chinook grunted. "Last year yuh rode that sunfisher, Angelface. . . . . th' snakiest bronc ever seen on th' Ponda Stampede Grounds. Yuh rode him purty and scratched him constant. Don't tell me yuh growed old in one year. Any other riders comin' that we know, Dwight?"

The veteran range rider frowned.

"Yeh," he answered, gloomily. "Th' Wind River Kid is back to these parts, and he's a-goin' tuh ride at Shell City."

A STRAINED silence followed this announcement, then a volley of oaths rose within the bunkhouse. "That dang Breed was sent tuh th' State Pen fer ten years," Iverson exploded. "How come he's loose now?"

"Must have broke jail, or been pardoned out," answered Dwight, slowly. "Likely th' last, fer he was bold as brass when we met. Asked me if Casper was ridin' this year, then grinned like a tomcat. The Indians are bettin' strong on him."

"No wonder," Casper chimed in. "He's some rodeo star. No matter how good white punchers or Indians are, some mongrel Breed can always go them a shade better. Th' Kid has never worked at Shell City, but before he got run in fer rustlin', he'd cleaned up at all the stampedes north o' here. His entry will raise hob with the old man's bet. Neither Diamond E nor TZ are apt tuh take many firsts with Wind River contestin'. He's a wizard at ropin' or bulldoggin', an' they say he's a better rider than Slim Hanley."

"Has Shell City rounded up any real broncs for these experts?" asked Chinook.

"Sufficient," Dwight assured him. "They're bringing in some right spoiled horsemeat. Over forty famous buckers. Hells Doorway and Coffin Nail are comin', and old Chief Bareface is bringin' a new horse, Gray Ghost, that's worse than either of 'em."

"Impossible," protested Iverson. "Hosses don't grow any badder than them two hell-cats."

"Gray Ghost did," Dwight persisted. "He's a wild stud from th' Lost Valley country. Fer six years he escaped th' horse hunters, but finally got bogged in a quicksand freshet and Bareface' cowboys roped him. Remember that black little Indian, Joe Stiles, that rode at Ponda? Game little peeler! Wal, he tackled th' wild hoss shortly after th' critter was catched, an' found too late that he'd straddled a sunfishin' devil. Gray Ghost crimped th' Indian's back th' third jump, and they say Stiles won't ever be able tuh ride agin. They took th' hoss to Foxhall Stampede then, an' he piled their three best riders, nary one of 'em lastin' forty feet from th'

chute. At Ponda, last week, no one tried him but Monte Carl, th' Miles City champ. Monte took his last ride on that gray killer. Snapped his neck as he fell. Gray Ghost ain't been saddled since. . . but he'll be waitin' at Shell City!"

"Fellers," shrugged Casper, "I ain't anxious tuh draw that bronc's number."

"Yuh're just nervous over Lewis' big bet," Chinook argued. "We're all in a blue funk, thinkin' what it means tuh th' boss if we fail. But when we ride intuh th' Rodeo Grounds it'll be different. We'll fergit tuhnight's graveyard talk. Wait 'til yuh cast yer eyes over Gray Ghost, Cas. He's only another bad hoss. . . not one bit worse than many yuh've tamed before.

"Mebbe," said Casper. "Mebbe!"

For a long minute a tense silence filled the bunkhouse. Then Paul Bird rose to his feet.

"Reckon I'll amble up the hill, boys," he said, slowly. "Good night!"

For an instant he paused in the doorway and turned back. His eyes sought out the silent newcomer, who lay sprawled on his bunk. A look of doubt flashed for an instant in his eyes.

"Good night. . . . . Bird," Tex said softly, without looking up.

The man in the doorway opened his mouth, then closed it again quickly.

"Good night!" he said for the second time as he disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER III

AT THE crest of a long ridge from which Shell City was plainly visible, seven Diamond E riders halted their sweat-stained mounts. Clad in fine rodeo garb and riding picked horses, they made a striking appearance . . . gay, yet business-like. Besides the superb beasts under saddle, pack animals and extras brought their total remuda to over twenty head.

Casper stretched his arm toward the distant town. "There she is," he shouted, "an' she shore looks wild."

Each rider centered his gaze upon the far-off scene, the white of the many tents, the gorgeous flags and banners, the dark, crawling mass that betokened a vast throng of humanity.

"Thar's the spot that makes or breaks Jim Lewis," Iverson observed, thoughtfully. "It's entirely up tuh us, boys, win or lose. If we fail—"

"We can't fail," Casper interrupted. "Failure means a long, deep hole where we put Jim Lewis an' cover him with dirt. It'd kill him shore tuh lose th' Diamond E."

"Right yuh are," said Dwight, as he started his horse down the slope. The others followed. Half an hour later they were riding into Shell City.

The town was crowded with cowboys, cowgirls, and ranchers. Indians were everywhere, and their camps were clustered thick outside the town. Squaws were at work, the smoke of their cooking fires filling the air. Loose ponies were grazing in droves under the care of small boys.

Saddled horses were tied in convenient spots all about the town. Tourists were darting here and there in autos, and license tags on their cars showed that they had come from distant states, drawn by rodeo advertising. In the town camp-site, the tents of these tourists were as plentiful as the Indian tepees outside on the Flat.

Work on all nearby ranches had been stopped, and every cowhand in the country was present. The sidewalks were completely hidden by the crowds, and every public building in town was packed with loiterers. Doll-racks, shooting galleries, and other amusement devices were running full-blast, and the ballyhoo of the barkers mingled with the

whoops of exuberant cowboys just in from the range.

Voices were raised and hands waved in greeting to the Diamond E boys, for they were widely known. Loud shouts of Casper's name proved his popularity. The seven riders headed toward the Rodeo Grounds at the far side of town. They were admitted at the huge gate, and rode across the arena to the stock pens and saddling chutes.

At the feed yard were great numbers of saddle horses of every description and color. . . all picked mounts and the finest in the country. There was feed and water here, so Casper led the way inside, and the boys took care of their horses at once. Dozens of other cowboys were there, working with their mounts, or strolling about, watching and anxious.

Scarcely had the Diamond E boys finished their tasks when they heard a shout outside the fence. Lewis had driven up in his big car, and was beckoning to them.

"This she-bang is a-goin' tuh start in an hour," he yelled excitedly. "Look at th' people fillin' up th' grandstand already. You boys pile in here, an' I'll drive yuh up town an' we'll git something tuh eat. I've entered yore names with th' committee, so yuh won't have tuh bother with that."

They packed themselves into the car, Lewis threw in the clutch, and they roared away. Casper and Bird sat in the front seat with the driver, and presently the bronco-buster spoke.

"Seen anything o' th' Wind River Kid, Boss?"

"He's here, but I haven't seen him," Lewis replied. "An' boys," he paused, drew a deep breath, "th' Kid has registered as one o' Blossom's riders. He's entered everything . . . . roping, bulldogging, and all. He's Blossom's new man!"

The cowboys looked at each other apprehensively. Here was bad news. The Wind River Kid, matchless rider, expert roper, bulldogger without equal, instead of being a free hand as they supposed, was arrayed against them as a cowboy in the employ of Bill Blossom.

"An' yore extra man an unknown quantity!" drawled Tex.

"Unknown quantity is right!" sneered Paul Bird, as all eyes focused on the newcomer. Casper laughed hollowly.

"Looks like Blossom means tuh win," he said, quietly. "But by godfrey, we'll be there tryin' all th' same."

"I've got a heap of confidence in you boys," Lewis announced hopefully. "We're not beat 'til th' last horse is rode."

Two cowgirls turned out of a side street. Chinook nearly fell out of the back seat waving at them, and the Wind River Kid was forgotten. A long string of cars was already winding toward the Rodeo Grounds, so the rancher drove as fast as he dared. They found the lunch room jammed, but Lewis secured places quickly, and the cowboys devoured a hasty meal. In half an hour they were back at the pens, ready for whatever might happen.

WHILE the Shell City Rodeo had drawn great crowds of holiday sightseers, others not so carefree or joyous were present. The horse pens to the right and the cattle pens at the left were full. Long-horned, fierce-eyed steers milled and trampled in the latter. Lean, leggy, and wild, they circled the corrals like beasts of prey.

Across from them were the horses selected because of their untamable savagery. These broncos were plump, and shining like silk, but their lean heads were held high in eternal watchfulness. Many a range had yielded up its outlaw buckers for Shell City's great contest.

The hip of each of these beasts bore a number, and whichever number a contestant drew, that horse he rode.

The Diamond E boys sat on the corral fence and took a long look at the bad ones. Angelface. . . . Bonesetter. . . . Little Joe. . . Black Powder. . . Hurricane. . . Radium. . . and many others known at Rodeos and Stampedes from Calgary to the Rio Grande, were there, and claimed their share of attention. Then there was that Montana roan, with the mild eye and the black heart, Hell's Doorway, a horse that none but champions had ridden successfully. And off by himself, near the fence, was a silver-colored beast that could have been no other than the outlaw of evil rumor, Gray Ghost.

In all that collection, he drew the major share of attention. As one looked at this magnificent animal, the wildness of the others seemed to diminish in contrast. Gray Ghost was a beautiful thing in a terrifying way. He seemed to flame with the vigor of life. Sleek, powerfully muscled he was, with flowing mane and tail, but his head was hideously shaped for a horse, more like that of a wolf. His bared teeth, rolling, glassy eyes, and flattened ears increased his frightfulness. He moved silently, and with the effortless ease of a panther, forward, sideways, or back. The other horses, wicked and treacherous as they were, seemed pitifully afraid of him.

A cowboy moved upon the planks and the horses milled in a terror-stricken mass. But Gray Ghost stood his ground, snorting a savage blast of defiance.

A strange light gleamed for a second in the eyes of Lewis' newest hand as he watched the horse, then his gaze shifted to Paul Bird and on to Casper. Bird was smiling ever so slightly, but Casper's face was grave.

"I'm shore glad yuh boys air ridin' th' saddle broncs with me," the big cowpuncher observed.

"What's the matter, Casper?" demanded Bird.

The bronc rider shrugged.

"Don't know, son, exactly. Must be gittin' old or something'. . . . but by heck, I hope I don't draw that Ghost critter. We cain't all draw him, though, even if one o' us should."

Bird laughed.

"Don't reckon he's as bad as he's cracked up tuh be," he suggested.

Casper shook his head gravely.

"What's yore idee, Tex?"

Sisterson raised a mild eye to the horse.

"Me," he said drily, "I ain't hankerin' tuh fork him."

THE GRANDSTAND outside the arena was black with people as the Diamond E punchers walked along the steer pens toward the chutes. Suddenly Casper pointed to the big gate where a dozen mounted Indians were filing in.

"That one in the lead," he said, "is the Wind River Kid."

The Kid was taller than his companions, and possessed the build of a Hercules. As the men peered at the swarthy, dust-caked face of the Breed, they grudgingly gave credit to the amazing tales they had heard concerning this particular cowboy's uncanny ability. And the Kid was entered as Blossom's man. Hard luck for Jim Lewis!

As the Breed caught sight of the Diamond E boys, he turned and muttered a few words to his companions. One of them, a slim, full-blood, laughed coarsely.

"Those snakes are up tuh something," Dwight warned his fellows. "We're going up against a dangerous crew. Blossom will undoubtedly fight us hard, since everything he owns depends upon our success here. . . but I don't

look for much trouble 'til just before the finals. All th' same, we'd better stick tuhgether, keep our eyes skinned for trickery, and watch our step constant."

"I'm right with you there," declared Iverson.

Dwight turned to the arena boss.

"What's on th' program tuhday?" he asked.

"Just th' usual run," that busy individual answered. "But with all this mob here, th' judges will grade mighty close. It's a-goin' tuh take top-hand work to make the finals."

"Come on, Chinook," yelled Iverson. "Steer-ridin' leads off, an' that's where you shine."

They hurried to the steer chutes where the lusty bellow of a longhorn told that cowboys were pulling tight the surcingle rope. A second more and the chute gate opened before a plunging bawling, spinning mouse-colored steer, one of the Blue Rock Indian boys aboard, whooping like a wild man. The rodeo was on, full speed. One after another they erupted from the chutes, those fighting steers.

Chinook, Pangot and Kells Brown, a puncher from Ponda, won day money against tough competition. The Wind River Kid had not entered this event, scorning to waste time on such "kid stuff." But he was in the calf-roping, winning over Iverson, his nearest rival, by two seconds. He also took first at the surcingle bronc riding, though Chinook of the Diamond E placed next.

Day money on the relay race went to Blossom's men, with the Diamond E completely outclassed. They made up for it, however, in the cow-pony race, where Lightfoot, Lewis' star-faced bay, ridden by Chinook, ran first, with Indian ponies next. Blossom's horse did not finish at all.

In the big money event, bull-dogging, it became evident that the competition between Lewis' men and those claimed by Blossom, would be extremely close. There was only half a second's difference between the fast time achieved by the Wind River Kid and that of Jerry Hall, the old Miles City hand.

The men were in a fever of excitement as they raced for the saddle chutes where the bronc riding was about to begin. In the narrow saddling chute, a horse was fighting and squealing as the saddle went on. The arena manager called a name, and the announcer rode toward the grandstand, bellowing through his megaphone.

"La—dies, and gents—Shell City Rodeo saves th' best 'til th' last—th' saddle buckers. You've just seen steer-riding, races, roping and bulldogging never equaled here or elsewhere. Th' big towns like Cheyenne think they draw all th' first-class talent, but the official records for this afternoon show that we don't take a back seat for any of them. And now we're a-goin' to turn out the bucking horses, the best in the West. Th' first rider is the Wind River Kid on a little horse called Dynamite. Here he comes. Whoop-eee!"

A lanky bay burst into the open with a series of jerky, body-racking leaps. He seemed to double himself into knots with his frenzied efforts to throw his rider. But the Wind River Kid was indeed a peeler. Holding his hat high in one hand, the half-breed spurred his horse in the shoulders at every jump, and as he rode he yelled, "I'm the riding Kid from the Wind River. I ride 'em forwards or backwards, and the higher they go the better I like 'em. Yip . . . yip. . . yoo—ee-e!"

The Kid did not pull leather after the report of the timer's gun, but recklessly raking, rode the bronc until it was done. At last Dynamite's tremendous pitches ceased and the hazer caught his halter.

The Breed leaped to earth and bowed low to the cheering throng.

A moment later Casper hurtled out on Radium, and made a good ride. Rider after rider followed, each with varying degrees of success. Paul Bird came through nicely on Blackbird, a little horse that shook its feet in excellent imitation of the famous bucker, "Hell's Doorway."

Lewis and the old-timers on the Diamond E spread watched tensely as the announcer called Tex Sisterson's name and number. A second later he flashed from the chute on a squealing, sunfishing bay known as "Powder House."

A grunt of satisfaction came from the lips of the owner of the Diamond E as his new hand rode the length of the run without once showing daylight over the pitching saddle.

Casper nodded as the grandstand roared a thunder of approval.

"'Th' boy kin ride hell fer leather!" he said, calmly.

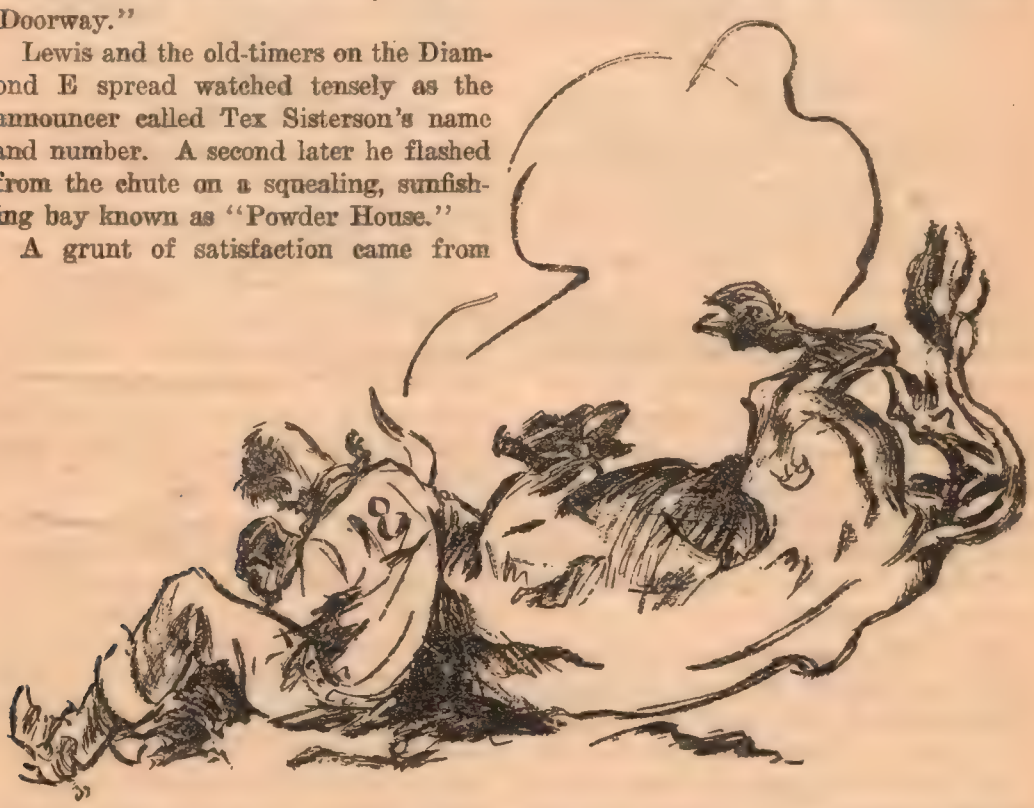
Old Dwight nodded.

"I kind o' figgered he could. . . on account he never said so."

Then came Slim Hanley, the Pendleton champion, demonstrating his marvelous ability upon that experienced and deceptive pitcher, "Coffin Nail." The crowd rewarded him with an admiring roar.

The announcer rode out, bellowing again.

"FOLKS, we've got a special feature for you. . . . one you'll always remember. We're going to turn loose the worst bucking horse th' West has ever known. . . . a sunfisher that's never been ridden longer than five jumps. I introduce to you our worst outlaw, Gray Ghost. He's in there now, being saddled. Hear him ramming the chute. Jimmy Pangot is the boy who'll attempt to ride him. Folks, you know Jimmy! He rode off with bronc peeling honors at Tuttle a month ago. He's a good twister. . . . but he's coming out now on a worse horse than Tuttle folks ever saw. Pangot on Gray Ghost. Turn 'em loose!"



The chute door swung back and with a wild shriek the ghost horse catapulted

into the sunlight, upon him Pangot, Bill Blossom's Indian twister, riding close. Gray Ghost pivoted like a silver flash, bucking backwards in deceptive leaps, and a long, wild roar went up from the crowd as they saw the evil-famed range tiger in action and knew that rumor had not exaggerated his deviltry. Unforgetably they saw the chunks of dirt flung up by his darting feet, and heard his hideous screams of fury.

Suddenly Gray Ghost squatted so low that his belly touched the ground. Then he sprang into the air, feet trailing like those of a bird rising on the wing. His body twisted sideways, farther and farther. Like the crack of a whip came the reversal in mid-air, the sunfish movement executed by a master. Combining the tactics of a spinner and a sunfisher, he pirouetted on, warming to his work.

Pangot's knee-grip slipped. One stirrup shot out, flopping loose. He toppled slightly to one side, lurched, then shot into the air like a rocket. He came down with terrific force, back first, a knockout blow. Blossom's cowboys ran out and carried him in.

Gray Ghost pitched on, bawling in mad rage, biting the earth in savage gulps, trying to rid himself of the clinging saddle. It lurched crazily, the stirrups clanging together high above the broncho's back. It was not a pretty sight.

Tex Sisterson, watching closely, set his jaw hard, and the odd little flicker of light showed again in his eyes.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST day of the Rodeo came to a close with Jim Lewis cheery and hopeful. His lean face glowed as he complimented his men upon the excellent showing they had made against such fast competition. It was apparent that the Diamond E owner conceded his rival no certainty of winning.

A street dance was in progress that night, and would continue each evening of the Rodeo. As the Diamond E boys stood outside the ropes, Casper announced his intention of hunting up a shoe store where he could secure some low-heeled footwear suitable for concrete pavements. Paul Bird accompanied the broncho buster to the nearest shop and stood idly by while his companion was being fitted.

"I feel like a duck in these flat-footed brogans," Casper complained, when at last he was ready to go. "But they're the clear thing fer concrete walks. Let's get back tuh th' gang."

They found the others and for some time strolled the streets in the company of dozens of other rollicking, boisterous cowboys, enjoying to the utmost this break in the monotony of lonely herd watching and toilsome rides over long cattle trails.

Everywhere, that evening, rodeo hands talked of Pangot's ride. The Indian peeler had not yet recovered consciousness, they said. The name of the ghost horse was continually in the air, like the chorus of some popular song. It was freely predicted that thereafter an ambulance would follow Gray Ghost each time he left the chute.

Slim Hanley walked by, stern-faced, somber. His gay velvet shirt shone like leopard skin. His calfskin belt was trimmed with solid silver conchos. The brim of his great woolly-white Stetson was bound with dark-red silk.

"Hi! There goes Slim," cried a young rider. "Give him a shot at Gray Ghost. Slim's the boy that can tame him!"

"Mebbe," muttered Casper, under his breath. "Mebbe."

Early the second morning the Diamond E riders went to the Rodeo grounds, took care of their horses, then loafed in

the warm sunshine, chatting with cowhands who hailed from all points of the compass. Surprisingly soon came the time for the afternoon program.

The second day went off much like the first. Lightfoot ran first again in the cowpony race, and Chinook got into the day money at both steer and surcingle bronc riding. Iverson and Jerry Hall equalled the fast time of the Wind River Kid at steer wrestling and calf roping.

At saddle bronc riding, Casper, Paul Bird, Tex Sisterson, Wind River Kid, and a long legged chap from the south, Buck Hanes, were high in marks on the judges' sheets.

All three of the Diamond E men drew good horses and rode them through in a manner that brought a shine to Lewis' eyes.

"I'm shore proud of yuh, boys," he cried, enthusiastically. "Yuh shore rode like champions."

But all these happenings were mere opening events for the crowd. Everyone knew that Slim Hanley had drawn Gray Ghost's number, and they were eagerly waiting for that eventful ride. How would the ghost horse perform with a champion clamped upon him? The stands buzzed with that absorbing, momentous question.

At last came the time for the answer. Gray Ghost was in the chute. He fought the saddlers like a maniac, his rolling eyes crazy. . . wicked. . . wild. Slim Hanley, Pendleton champion, stood on the chute, watching closely. He spoke to the saddlers in bold, reckless tones... but those near him could see the sweat of fear upon his dark, handsome face.

Slim tested the saddle with care, then slowly lowered himself into the seat. With precision he wrapped his long fingers around the buck rope and anchored his feet firmly in the stirrups.

"Turn us out!" he yelled.

The gate-tender flung open the chute and cowered back against the planks.

Gray Ghost hurtled out, a twisting, writhing inferno of action. Dust kicked up under his flying hoofs like yellow smoke. His scream of rage, though, echoed today over a tense, silent, ever-watchful stand.

Slim Hanley rode as a champion should... graceful... hooking freely... body bending with every movement of the horse. But Gray Ghost had just begun.

Squirming like a trapped snake, he swapped ends, spinning like a top, sunfishing in desperate fury. And throughout that whirlwind of action, he repeatedly found time to strike the ground with the force of a pile driver in his stiffened knees.

Suddenly, Casper's cry rang out.

"Watch Slim's neck. He's going!"

Slim Hanley's dark head snapped crazily... his splendid, lithe body went suddenly limp, even as Casper's cry of alarm died away. Like a great black frog, Hanley turned a twisting somersault in mid-air, and fell crumpled and motionless.

Gray Ghost's triumphant scream shrilled forth.

What a strange horse! Strange and terrible!

A swarm of cowboys rushed to the spot where Hanley lay so still. They took him up carefully, with bared heads.

Slim Hanley had taken his final ride!

Tex Sisterson turned his eyes slowly toward Paul Bird.

"Kind of an ornery critter, ain't he ... Bird?" he observed softly.

For an instant, the eyes of the two men met, and for the first time an open dislike flashed between them.

CASUALTIES are expected at all big rodeos. The street dance went on that night regardless of Hanley's

death. The Diamond E boys looked on again, and somehow, Paul Bird and the silent Tex Sisterson seemed always close together.

Near by, two ranchers discussed the Gray Ghost.

"That hoss should be shot," asserted one of them. "A critter that kin do fer Slim Hanley ain't natural!"

"Th' Lord shore had a grudge at bronc riders when he done fashioned that Gray Ghost," agreed the other. "A feller that wants tuh die, kin reach th' Everlastin' mighty sudden on him!"

"Cas," asked Bird, suddenly, "will you fork Gray Ghost if you happen to draw him?"

"Reckon I will, son," grinned the buster.

"Would you, Tex?" Bird turned to the new rider.

"Yuh askin' officially fer Lewis?"

"Hell, no, he ain't," snapped Casper. "Jim'd never ask yuh tuh ride that hellion. Nor me, either. But it may take a trip on th' ghost horse tuh hold the Diamond E. In such case, I'll ride."

Bird was just about to continue the discussion when a heavy-set breed lurched drunkenly through the crowd. Behind him trailed a dozen others, all showing signs of heavy drinking.

Tex watched them come. His eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

Suddenly, the first of the half-breeds swerved from his path to step heavily across Iverson's instep.

The cowboy grunted with surprise and pain, and before he could even so much as step back, the breed had whirled on him with a savage oath and driven his fist to the puncher's jaw.

Caught off balance, Iverson went crashing to the pavement.

With a bellow of rage, Casper bounded forward and drove both his huge fists into the breed's dark, bloated face.

The breed reeled backward into the thick of the party which had been following him. They rushed forward at the first blow. An instant later, brass knuckles flashed under the street lights, and a close-held blackjack arched high overhead.

For an instant the Diamond E riders did not realize that they were the center of an organized attack. Then Casper's voice boomed out to take command.

"Back to back, boys!" he roared, as one of his great arms swooped down to drag Iverson to his feet.

Then, just as the defensive ring was formed, Jerry Hall sank to the pavement limp, the blood spurting from his head in a stream.

A second later, the cowboys had formed a ring around him... every man facing out... fighting like mad.

The man who had felled Jerry raised his iron bar again and sprang straight at Casper.

At the same instant, there came a cry so ferocious and blood-chilling that the breed paused in their attack.

It was the wolf-howl of old Dwight, once the terror of the Ponda camps. He had jerked a short forty-five from his armpit and fired twice into the ground.

"Now, damn yuh... yuh'll git all th' fight yuh want!"

One of the attackers hesitated for a second. Instantly, the old range rider was upon him, taking the fight to the enemy.

Dwight's left fist shot up to snap the breed's head back. His right, holding the still smoking gun, came down with pile-driver force to split his enemy's scalp with a three inch gash.

The sight was too much for the rest of the thugs, and like shadows they slunk into the crowd to disappear.

Jerry Hall had come to, and was struggling to his feet. Men such as he know nothing of the word "quit." His companions bathed his head and ban-

daged it. Aside from a headache, the bulldogger seemed as fit as ever.

"I'll feel fine by mornin'," he promised. "I'll bulldog tuhmorrow in spite o' Bill Blossom an' all his shady tricks."

"Let's git tuh bed," suggested old Dwight. "We shore don't want no more trouble tuhnight!"

CHAPTER V.

THE DAY of the finals dawned dry, hot, and still. Grand rodeo weather. But the morning brought to the Diamond E, unexpected trouble.

As Chinook led Lightfoot out to drink he saw that the horse was lame. His startled exclamation brought his comrades quickly... apprehension lined upon each face.

They worked diligently with the horse, but liniments, hot applications and massage brought no relief.

Chinook immediately suggested the idea that Blossom, or some of his allies, had tampered with the animal. It was possible. Lightfoot had been stabled with the rest of the Diamond E stock, and no close watch had been kept over them.

Search as they would, Lightfoot showed no signs of having been tinkered with. But whether it was Blossom's doing or not, the horse was definitely out of the event he had been expected to win. This meant a hundred dollars loss to the Diamond E.

"I was countin' on that hundred smackers tuh balance Blossom's stake in th' relay race," Chinook grumbled. "Reckon I'll have tuh cop first money in both th' surcingle ridin' an' th' steer forkin', now."

Lewis heard of Lightfoot's lameness with a remorseful face.

"It's my fault," he told his boys. "I should have had him watched. I reckon 'twas Blossom that lamed him, all right."

"By jing!" Paul Bird cut in suddenly, "I got a hunch!"

"What is it, son?" demanded the rancher.

Bird hesitated for a second.

"I ain't shore enough tuh go talkin' yet," he answered, slowly, "but I'll be able tuh tell later if what I suspect is true."

"All right," agreed Lewis. He did not notice, as he turned toward the others, that the eyes of Paul Bird fixed themselves upon Tex, the new rider.

"How yuh feelin' tuhday, Jerry?" Lewis asked solicitously.

"Mighty punk!" admitted the bulldogger. "But I'll down my beef, just th' same," he added, determinedly.

In spite of his plucky words, Jerry showed plainly the result of his injury. His step was slow, his actions uncertain. His face bore a pallid hue, and his eyes were weary and dull.

"I'm afraid Jerry is out," Casper confided softly to Iverson. "Damn that tricky Blossom, anyway!"

On the preceding Rodeo days, riders had been thrown, ropers had blundered, and bulldoggers had failed to down their steers. The judges' list of those contestants eligible for the final events carried only a small percentage of the original entries. Iverson, roper; Jerry Hall, bulldogger; Chinook, Casper, Paul Bird and Tex Sisterton, riders... all had made the finals... and were ready to represent the Diamond E. Except in the races, Lewis still had hopes.

The time for the opening of the finals slid by... swiftly... inexorably. As on the previous days, steer riding came first on the program. Despite close competition from Pangot, Chinook took first with his fancy ride on a bawling, plunging steer, and Lewis had a hundred dollars to the credit of the Diamond E.

Blossom's men took the relay race which followed, and the score between the two ranches were tied. In the cow-

pony race, neither Diamond E nor TZ scored. Indian mustangs from Blue Rock carried all money places with ease.

The ropers came next. They were pitted against quarry which would test their skill to the utmost... their particular opposition being furnished by a number of range calves especially selected for the finals. They were slim and light, and as speedy as the wind.... yet it was not their swiftness afoot that made them such difficult prey. Terrified by horse and rider, they were uncertain in their actions, leaping ahead in sudden spurts, then stopping suddenly, to turn and dodge like rabbits ahead of the hounds.

The first three ropers out had their troubles. The wily little calves squatted close to earth to avoid the noose, or else leaped entirely through it. They zigzagged crazily, and escaped the cow-

boy's first throws. The second time, though, the hissing ropes fell true, and the ropers threw and tied their respective victims.... and swore disgustedly, for their time was poor.

The Wind River Kid came next, and he made a successful throw. His calf was tied promptly. The announcer called the time, and Lewis realized that it was fast, wondered if Iverson could lower it. If the boy had been in first class shape... but that punch to the jaw last night had done him no good. It hardly seemed possible... yet there was a chance.

Two Indian ropers had their turn, and then the announcer called the name of Pete Iverson. The Diamond E boys felt a thrill of pride as they watched their buddy mount his fleet, snow-white roping horse. Iverson held his lasso carefully, a wide loop in his right hand and a series of neat coils in his left. A short tie rope was gripped between his teeth.

He signalled his readiness, and the man at the chute swung wide the gate. A lean, white-faced calf shot out, stopped suddenly, then at the sight of the rider, tore away at top speed. Iverson's mount needed neither spur nor guidance. With outstretched neck and flying feet he overtook the calf in less than a dozen leaps. The rider whirled his lasso and threw it. The oval noose went straight to its mark and was jerked taut.

The white horse stopped, plowing up the sand, and Iverson, leaping wide, ran down the rope to the bawling calf. Quick as a cat he pounced upon the white-face, flanked it, and tied it down. As he raised his hand, signalling that the job was done, Jim Lewis felt a great surge of relief. Iverson had not failed. The calf-roping money, at least, was safe.

PETE IVERSON'S time was not equalled that afternoon. His record still stands unbroken, a mark of pride to Shell City. Yet after all, his marvelous speed netted only two hundred dollars toward the winning of Lewis' bet.

The Diamond E rancher joined his boys while the crowd was still wildly acclaiming the new champion.

"Boys," he told them, "I just found out what ailed Lightfoot! Some skunk tied a silk thread under his leg tendon an' clipped the ends off short. It's an old trick to cripple a horse in short order... but a danged clever one, too. I should o' suspected it, an' looked fer it before."

"By jing, then," cried Paul Bird, "I was right!"

"What do yuh mean, son?" demanded the rancher.

Bird dropped his voice.

"Whar's Tex?"

"Went back tuh the roomin' house to git a pair o' spurs," Casper told him.

Paul laughed harshly.

"Like hell he did! Went tuh frame some more dirt with Blossom or tuh collect fer th' last."

"What air yuh tryin' tuh say?" cried Lewis.

"That it was that dirty crooked Tex Sisterson who crippled Lightfoot," Paul Bird accused, coldly. "Last night he got up an' went out from th' roomin' house. From the window I seen him meet another feller that I know dang well was Blossom!"

"Why didn't yuh say so before?" snapped old Dwight.

"Cause I warn't shore, an' I knowed Jim thought he was all right. I know, now, it was him that fixed up that street fight last night. He gave 'em th' high sign tuh jump us, an' yuh'll notice he never got hurt none!"

For a long minute there was a heavy, ominous silence.

"By hell!" Casper said, quietly, "I wouldn't o' believed it!"

"He's been doin' a heap o' good ridin' fer us." Jim Lewis still doubted the evidence, was still willing to defend the lad he had added as his one new man.

"Yep," agreed Bird, but his voice was full of scorn, "he has. But he ain't been winnin' no money, an' when it comes tuh th' finals, he'll throw yuh down jest when yuh're countin' on him!"

"My God!" groaned Lewis. "But I reckon it shore looks as if yuh was right, Paul."

"We ought tuh swing th' buzzard," growled Chinook.

"That'd be too damn good fer him!" cried Iverson.

"It just don't seem possible, or reasonable," said Casper, more to himself than to his companions.

"Yuh're right, at that," conceded Iverson. "It don't. But facts is facts, and when we git hold o' that damned Tex Sis—"

"Yuh lookin' fer me, gents?" Sisterson's voice cut in, soft and low, as always.

To a man, the Diamond E riders whirled about to face him.

"Let's break th' damn traitor's neck!" suggested Chinook. The men started forward.

The new man stood waiting and watching, poised on the balls of his feet. A cold spark of light danced in his eyes.

"Hold on a shake!" Lewis great voice boomed out as he strode forward. "If you boys mess him up here, yuh're liable tuh git barred from the finals... an' that's jest what Bill Blossom is a-lookin' fer. We kin afford tuh wait."

He turned swiftly to Tex.

"I don't need tuh tell yuh that yuh're fired. Git out o' our sight an' back tuh yore crooked boss, yuh Judas! If we find yuh after this show is over, I won't answer fer what we'll do tuh yuh!"

For a moment there was a tense silence. Then one of Sisterson's infrequent smiles tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"I'll be seein' yuh, gents!" he said, drily, as he turned and started away.

The loyal Jerry Hall could not re-

frain from hurling an oath after him.

"Never mind, lads," Lewis told his boys. "This thing ain't over, an' I ain't licked yet when I got men behind me like yuh boys are!"

"By God, no!" chorused his cowboys. "We'll show that damned Blossom an' his scaly tricks!"

SURCINGLE bronc riding came next. The redoubtable Chinook got a bad break. His horse was slow, not slow enough to entitle him to another mount, but too slow to make a winning ride possible.

The Wind River Kid drew a fighting demon of a buckskin, and the judges awarded him first place.

Chinook came back grumbling savagely at his luck.

"We've got tuh take either th' bulldoggin' or th' saddle bronc peelin', fellers. We're still leadin' Blossom by a hundred bucks. Either of these three hundred dollar events will beat him. Hi! Thar goes Howlin' Wolf from th' Blue Rock, th' first bulldogger. Boy, look at that dogie run. That Indian'll never put him down under a minute... Thar! What'd I tell yuh? Slow work!"

"The Wind River Kid from the TZ ranch is the next bulldogger," came the booming, leathery tones of the announcer.

The name went through the Diamond E boys like an electric current. Silently, intently, they watched the formidable Breed in action. Under their scrutiny, he demonstrated the skill that had made him famous. His leap from his running horse to the racing steer was executed with savage recklessness, and he halted the longhorn and twisted it down with ferocious strength.

"Time for the Wind River Kid, twenty-one seconds flat!" affirmed the announcer.

Diamond E riders looked at each other speculatively. The time was fast. It was unlikely that it would be lowered that day. If it stood, it meant that Blossom would be leading Lewis by two hundred dollars.

Jerry Hall nervously stalked about, his bandaged head prominent among the crowd. An injured man about to enter the wildest, most dangerous sport that he-men ever invented! He whirled about abruptly and strode towards his horse as the ominous words of the announcer rang out, "Next bulldogger, Jerry Hall. Jerry Hall, get set!"

It took no practiced eye to see that Jerry was far from fit as he swung up on his fleet black horse. His face was as gray as ashes, and his hands shook on the bridle reins. Jim Lewis came up to him swiftly.

"Jerry," pleaded the old rancher, "don't try it. Yuh ain't able tuhday. Tuh hell with th' Diamond E. Let Blossom have it!"

"Boss, I'm out tuh do my best," answered Jerry. "I'm goin' tuh show Bill Blossom he ain't got th' old ranch yet."

"Don't try it, Jerry," begged Lewis. "It ain't worth—"

"Shut up, yuh old woman!" The bulldogger smiled as he regarded his employer. "Paul Bird, get yore hazing hoss in place."

Bird, as he swung to his own saddle, saw the dubious shake of Casper's head. He knew then that Jerry Hall would fail.

"Ready, boys?" called the gate man.

"Let him come!" yelled Jerry.

The longhorn came out swiftly. Paul and Jerry had him between them in a moment. The steer lengthened into its full stride, and Jerry's skillful cutting horse drew close, crowding in toward those wicked horns.

Jerry leaned far out of the saddle, caught the steer's horns and leaped. The

longhorn was a huge brute, and ran swiftly on, carrying the bulldogger's heavy weight like a feather. But Jerry's pointed boot-heels stabbed the ground, cutting deep furrows as he slowed the steer to a gradual stop. He began the cunning twist on the spreading horns. The judges were near at hand, one with stop-watch in hand.

Suddenly Paul Bird saw a change come over the bulldogger's face. The grayness faded into a ghastly white. Jerry Hall lurched, then straightened slightly as his desperate will strove to uphold his toppling body. And then he slumped forward, his hands relaxing on the wide horns. The steer shook himself and walked away.

Jerry lay in a dead faint. At last, at the crucial moment, his tortured nerves had failed him. Bird and Casper carried him from the arena.

"Jerry Hall, no time!" called the announcer. "Next bulldogger, Kells Brown from Ponda."

"Poor old Jerry shore was game," muttered Casper, "but that don't help tuh win Jim Lewis' bet."

They handed Hall over to the white-clad attendants at the ambulance, and then watched the Ponda bulldogger make a clumsy throw. Suddenly Casper turned to Bird.

"Paul," he exclaimed, heatedly, "this bulldoggin' pays big money. We don't dare tuh let it slip by without tryin'. Th' Wind River Kid has th' fastest time so far, an' if Blossom wins this event, th' Diamond E has just simply got tuh take first at saddle bronc ridin' or Lewis loses his ranch. Thar's a hundred things kin happen tuh keep us out o' the saddle bronc money."

"Not with yuh ridin' fer th' Diamond E!" Bird cut in.

"Thanks, Paul, but even with that, it's too big a chance. I'm goin' tuh try throwin' a steer. I used tuh do it, years ago. With luck, I might lower th' Kid's time."

"Th' judges wouldn't let yuh enter, now," Paul protested. "This is th' finals, remember."

"That won't matter," persisted the broncho-buster. "Those fellows know me. They know about Lewis' bet, too. They'll let me take a turn in place of Jerry. I'll put it up to them."

He rushed off at top speed. Blossom protested, but the judges overruled it, and permitted Casper a trial.

IN AN incredulously short time he was back, leading out Jerry Hall's bulldogging horse. The announcer bawled out Casper's name and a steer was soon ready.

"Come on, Paul," Casper yelled. "Get set!"

"Wait!" cried Jim Lewis, suddenly. He had caught sight of Casper's shoes, the low-heeled, broad-toed street shoes bought two nights before. "Yuh can't bulldog in them."

Casper swore vividly.

"My ridin' boots are over with my saddle. I plumb forgot I hadn't changed yet. We'll just have tuh go this way. They're a-yellin' fer us tuh hurry.... an' we can't hold up th' show fer a little thing like a pair o' heels."

"Here he comes!" the gate man warned. ... and a white-spotted steer emerged from the chute with a series of frightened leaps. Casper and Bird flashed after him like hounds after a deer.

In a hundred foot run, Casper's horse was neck and neck with the steer and the big cowboy was leaning low from the saddle, arms outstretched.

On the other side of the steer, Bird's horse seemed to swerve slightly outward, and the racing steer swung a bit wider from Casper's horse.

To get his hands on the wicked horns,

the cowboy had to swing even farther from his saddle. Just as his hands closed on the widespread horns, the clumsy, low-heeled street shoe slipped through the stirrup and held in a vice-like grip.

Horse and steer, running at top speed, strained apart as they tore along... and between them, stretched tight as a fiddle string, was the great body of Casper. Stamped on the bulldogger's face was the certain knowledge of impending doom.

The hoarse, savage roar of the crowd cut off short, as though a curtain had been dropped before them. Every tense onlooker knew that death rode in that arena.

In an instant came the grisly finish.

Even with Casper's great strength, his fingers wrenched loose, and his magnificent body shot downward under the running horse, to be dragged between the twinkling hoofs.

Paul Bird, riding now like a demon, thundered up to sieze the reins of the frightened black and jerk him to a plunging stop amidst a cloud of flying sand.

Cowboys were swarming toward the spot. In a moment they freed Casper's trapped foot and dragged his maimed and bleeding body to safety. His gay clothes were torn to ribbons; his eyes were closed and his white face streaked with blood. His right leg was crumpled like a length of rope.

The ambulance came slowly lumbering across the arena. Two white-garbed men bent over the injured man.

"Two or three ribs broken..... leg broken twice," the doctor announced tersely. "He'll pull through all right, though, barring internal injuries."

"Thank God fer that!" groaned Jim Lewis. "Good old Casper! Give him every care that money kin buy, men!"

Casper's eyes opened for a moment... but they were wild, burning and excited.

"Yuh got tuh win th' bronk ridin', boys," he choked. "Save th' Diamond E.... ride.... win...." Then he was gone again.

"Well, lads, I reckon it's all over!" said Lewis, sadly, when he was alone with what was left of his cowboys. "Paul is a great rider, but he ain't had th' experience o' the Wind River Kid."

At that moment, the arena manager called loudly through his megaphone:

"Bronc riders get over here and draw your horses for the finals! First rider comes out in twenty minutes!"

"We're a-countin' on yuh, son," Lewis said, gravely. "Yuh'll git th' Diamond E, some day, onless Bill Blossom gits it now. An' it looks like it's entirely up tuh yuh."

There was a strange glint in Paul Bird's eyes as he stood there by the side of the grizzled old veteran who had wagered his all. There seemed to be an instant of indecision, then he turned and started slowly toward the drawing booth.

"See yuh all later," he called over his shoulder.

"Good luck!" offered old Dwight. "Draw a good one, son, an' ride him hell-fer-leather!"

A moment later Paul Bird disappeared in the crowd.

CHAPTER VI

FOR FIFTEEN minutes, Jim Lewis and his cowboys waited impatiently for Bird's return and information regarding the luck of the draw and the horse he had drawn.

"I shore hope the boy don't git that hell-cat, Gray Ghost," Iverson deprecated apprehensively, as he twisted his great, gnarled hands.

"Thar's eight chances tuh one that he

won't get him," Lewis argued hopefully.

"Is thar only eight left in th' finals?" asked Chinook.

The rancher nodded.

"Yep, that's all. They struck off Casper's name when he went down. Course Tex Sisterson is still in, but onless he rides fer Blossom, I reckon he'll drop out, too."

"Even so," old Dwight muttered under his breath, "they'll pick out th' worst eight hosses in th' band tuh draw from, an' thar won't none of 'em be a bargain."

"La...dies, an' gents," came the booming voice of the announcer, "we will now give out th' names of th' riders and their horses. Each rider in th' finals drew a sealed envelope with a number inside, wrote his name on it, and turned it in to the judges. Chinook, of th' Diamond E, draws Little Joe."

"Aw, hell!" grumbled Chinook. "Even if I fork him, and rake him constant, he ain't bad enough tuh give me a win if th' Wind River Kid draws a really bad actor and rides him!"

One after another the announcer called the names of the riders and their mounts. The last to be called was the Wind River Kid, who drew that prize-winning bucker, Hell's Doorway.

A look of puzzled horror flashed across the face of Jim Lewis as he turned to his boys. Nowhere in the list had the announcer mentioned the name of Paul Bird. Nor had the ghost horse been assigned a rider.

"Good Lord!" cried the rancher. "What do yuh suppose has happened tuh Paul?"

"I'll see!" yelled Dwight, as he sprang away toward the judges ring.

When he came back five minutes later, Chinook was just flashing from the chute. Little Joe was outdoing his reputation, and Chinook, wearied and worn by the strain, went spinning to earth.

"My God, look!" cried old Dwight. "And Paul never drew! Blossom must o' downed him with another of his scaly tricks!"

Jim Lewis went white under his tan. His last hope was gone.

"Then that's th' end!" he said slowly, and his voice all but broke.

"No, by thunder, it ain't th' end!" roared the ever-faithful Iverson. "I'll ride."

"Thar's only one hoss left," said Dwight, slowly.

"Yuh mean....?" Pete's face grew grim.

Old Dwight nodded gravely.

"Yep.... that's right.... the killer, Gray Ghost!"

For a long half-minute there was a tense silence.

Iverson jerked up his chaps, pulled

his hat hard over the back of his head. A grim smile of determination set across his lips.

"I'll fork the critter," he announced, solemnly.

"No, no! Not that!" cried Lewis in quick protest. "Anyway, they wouldn't let you in now. They've let one o' our men in th' finals without goin' through th' preliminaries, ... an' they shore won't do it again."

"I reckon yuh're right," Iverson admitted, hollowly. "In that case, we've simply got tuh find Paul an' git him back in time tuh ride th' Ghost!"

"I'm qualified fer th' finals," said a soft voice, "an' I'll ride th' skate fer yuh!"

Four men whirled about as one.

"What th' hell?" cried Lewis.

Tex Sisterson stood six feet behind them, his thumbs hooked in his belt, a tight little smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. In his eyes, a strange light danced.

With an oath, old Dwight jerked his pistol free of his armpit holster and covered the tall cowboy.

"So it's yuh, is it?" he snarled.

" 'Tain't nobody else," Tex admitted, drily.

"Well, damn yuh, thar ain't no skunks a ridin' fer th' Diamond E. What have yuh an' Bill Blossom done tuh Paul Bird?"

"Feller," Tex stared straight into the eyes of the old puncher, "mebbe yuh don't rightly savvy skunk smell. Yuh should o' kept yore eyes on Paul." He whirled swiftly to face Jim Lewis. "Looks tuh me as if yuh're rival has played his ace. It's up tuh yuh. Do I ride, or not?"

Lewis considered for a long minute.

"There's shore things a-goin' on around here that I don't understand," he said, finally. "If yuh don't ride fer us, we lose anyway. So it's all right with me if yuh want tuh tackle th' Ghost hoss, ... providin' yuh kin forget th' way we've treated yuh—"

"We'll forgit that," shrugged Tex, dropping back into his mild tone of voice. "Let's go!"

Even as he spoke, the Wind River Kid flashed from his chute on Hell's Doorway, and the resultant ride was a beautiful piece of artistry.

TEX bounded away, and a moment later, the dazed Diamond E boys heard the announcer call his name. They charged after him to help saddle. If Jim Lewis was willing to string along with Tex Sisterson, his men were willing to trust his judgment. They even insisted that he use Casper's Association saddle, and the halter with the soft, braided buck-rope.

Tex strapped his spurs a bit tighter to his high-heeled boots, and waited patiently while the corral men prodded Gray Ghost into the chute.

The white horse's savage shrieks rose in fiendish clamor and the heavy planks bent and crashed under his maddened plunging. But finally they had him fastened in with poles.

Iverson and Dwight haltered him, and slid the saddle in place. Tex straddled the narrow chute and watched while his helpers drew up the cinches until they cracked.

"We've screwed that hull on tuh stay," old Dwight assured the rider, as he tested the rigging. "Ride him close, son, ... ride him close. Keep yore neck stiff and yore teeth gritted."

Tex made no answer. He had his eyes fixed upon the gray bronk beneath him, ... the quivering, coil-spring muscles, ... the glaring, crazy eyes rolling upward.

Slowly Tex Sisterson lowered himself into the smoooth leather seat. Carefully,

he adjusted his feet in the stirrups. His left hand gripped hard upon the buck-rope.

All the cowboys, ropers and riders had crowded close around the chute. The judges, in rigid silence, sat upon their fretful mounts. It was like a stage set for Gray Ghost. Behind him in the corrals, Tex heard the restless thump of the bronks and the raucous bawls of steers, ... but the great crowd in front was silent as the announcer's far-carrying voice rang out:

"La . . . dies, an' gents, ... keep your eyes on chute number two. Gray Ghost is in there, folks, ... rarin' to go. May God help the lad that Fate picked to ride him! Tex Sisterson of the Diamond E, folks, coming out on Gray Ghost!"

The puncher signalled the gate-tender to swing back the door. It opened, and before him, Tex saw the wide arena, the high, strong fence, the tier on tier of seats packed solidly with white-faced spectators.

Then, like a striking rattler, Gray Ghost leaped into action, and Tex was no longer conscious of the crowd. In fact, he was aware of nothing but the impact of terrible, shocking blows as the Ghost struck the earth with the rapidity and force of a trip hammer. Sounds began to roar in Tex Sisterson's ears like the rush of flooded rivers. He seemed juggled in the gray haze of some frightful dream, bruised and beaten mercilessly by a giant fist. It seemed to the rider that hours already had passed, ... and each succeeding second was an eternity of torture. Yet vaguely he knew that not once had daylight showed between himself and the saddle, ... and that he was raking the bronk in the shoulders with reckless fury.

Gray Ghost sunfished on, and the strange cowboy still rode him. But a red mist was beginning now to blot out the rider's sight, ... and blood spouted warm from his nostrils.

"One more, ... one more," thought Tex. "If I can only last just one more jump." Then, all at once, he was floating through space. He felt a terrific impact, and his clutching hands closed on dry sand. Tex knew then that he had been thrown, ... and he felt a twinge of anguish for the blasted hopes of the man whom he had tried to help. His aching head reeled, and merciful unconsciousness claimed his racked body.

TEX returned to a comprehension of his surroundings to find himself reclining on a saddle blanket in the shade of the corral fence. Chinook was kneeling beside him.

"Yuh're fine as a fiddle, Tex, boy," Chinook assured him. "Just had th' wind shook out o' yuh when yuh fell, ... but yuh shore took a hard lacin' before that. Yuh're shore lucky, son, that yuh've got a back like rawhide."

Tex groaned.

Lucky! What did Chinook mean? Lucky! When he had failed? When the Diamond E, which he had tried so hard to save, was gone?

Just then a step sounded beside him, and he looked up and straight into the eyes of Jim Lewis.

"How are yuh, son?" the old rancher asked, solicitously.

Tex shook his head sadly.

"I'm a heap sorry," he said quietly, "but th' white hoss was jest a trifle too much fer me. I'll shore hate tuh see Blossom take th' Diamond E."

For a long moment Lewis stared at Chinook, then at Tex. In his eyes was utter bewilderment. It was old Dwight who finally comprehended the situation.

"Thunder on wheels!" he roared. "Th' boy don't know what happened, why, Tex, yuh wasn't throwed 'til after

th' timer's gun was fired. Yuh must have been too near knocked out tuh hear th' shot. Boy, yuh made th' finest ride I ever hope tuh see. First money goes tuh yuh without a whimper."

"Yuh mean we won? Th' Diamond E is safe?" cried Tex in wide-eyed astonishment, breaking through his wall of reserve for the first time.

"Yuh shore did, son!" answered Lewis, slowly. "But how'd yuh come tuh do it? An' d'yuh know anything about what happened to Paul? I'm worried as heck."

"Yuh needn't be. I know consid'able 'bout that boy. I saw him meet Bill Blossom a while ago, an' I made it my bus'ness tuh hear what was said. That feller that says he is Paul Bird, yore nephew, ain't nothin' of th' kind. I don't know why yuh 'lowed him tuh fool yuh so easy, ... but that feller was a Blossom man, planted on yuh when they figgered tuh trick yuh intuh this bet. Why, there they go, now!"

Every eye turned as Tex pointed. A gasp escaped the crowd, ... a gasp of incredible astonishment. In full view, Paul Bird and Bill Blossom were running swiftly away from the chutes, and even as the Diamond E men watched, they turned a corner and disappeared from view.

"The dirty scum," roared the veteran rancher. "An' tuh think we believed th' lies that dang rat told. D'yuh s'pose yuh can ever fergive us—"

"Aw, shucks," Tex grinned, "let 'er go!"

Jim Lewis stuck out a grizzled hand, and the youngster grasped it firmly.

"It's shore white of yuh tuh let things slide," said the older man, fervently. "What I can't understand is how they could take a chance on plantin' that feller as my nephew. O' course, it was easy tuh fool me, ... I ain't seen th' real Paul since he was nine years old. But how—"

"From what I heard," explained Tex, "yuh told Blossom yore nephew was comin'. There was some other talk about him disappearin'. I reckon they planned that. An' something was said about a special detective from th' Cattleman's Association lookin' fer him."

"We'll get in touch with the Association at once." Jim Lewis' voice was tinged with deadly menace. "As fer that lousy Blossom outfit, we'll wipe 'em off—"

" 'Twon't be necessary," Tex assured him softly, a real smile showing on his lips for the first time. "Yuh've already won the TZ ranch. That wipes 'em off the map. An' that special detective found yore nephew, an' he come on up here. He tried tuh tell yuh who he was, ... but yuh wouldn't tumble. Yuh see, that other hombre couldn't have been Paul Bird, ... 'cause I am, ... yore Texas sister's son!"

"Mister Maffy," drawled the Cabresto Kid, suddenly stepping out between the two. "Climb on your hoss an' git!"

The Cabresto Kid

By S. OMAR BARKER

THE CABRESTO KID came riding over the rim into the Boney Horn Basin looking for a job. What he found, *pronto* and plenty of it, was trouble, rarin' and redhot. The Kid was a lean and wiry young *'chacho,* too tall to enter a bunkhouse with his hat on. He wore spurs that jingled and pockets that, right now at least, didn't. Most notable about his face was a good-humored grin that resembled, when turned on full length, about a hundred yards of sunrise. He didn't know whether he could play a fiddle or not because he'd never tried it, but he was aware that he could snap a baby loop onto a prairie dog at twenty-five feet because he had. He knew what he could do with a six gun, too, but he didn't talk about it. Whenever he wanted to show off, he did so by whistling seven different ways in perfect imitation of five different kinds of birds, a porcupine and a chipmunk, throwing his voice, imitating a hog caught under a fence, or a dogfight.

He was, to be quite short about a long *hombre,* just what the story books mean by a "Knight of the Saddle."

Maybe he was a knight all right, but he didn't wear steel armor—which is how come he ducked hurriedly into the timber when the shooting began, just about two snorts and a sniffle over the ridge toward the Boney Horn Basin. But he didn't turn back. He didn't

know what might lie in front of him, but he knew well enough that he'd rather chance it than backtrail over what lay behind him. Behind lay a long desert trail from a busted cow ranch far to the west. Ahead, shooting or no shooting, lay cow country, lush with grass. Maybe a job.

AS SUDDENLY as it had started, the shooting stopped. He heard somebody shout a curse somewhere down beyond the next shelf-like rimrock where the timber began to thin out. It sounded interesting to the Cabresto Kid. He left his horse in the black timber and did a little pussyfoot maneuvering to the rimrock's edge. As always he took his rope with him. There was another sputter of shooting, then silence. The Kid crawled to the cliff edge behind a little up-jutting of rock and peeped over.

Twenty odd feet below him a line of new set posts began at the cliff wall and strung out down the hill. Off a few steps to the left of them were four men flat on their bellies. Three of them wriggled among the clutter of broken off boulders that were always strewn along the slopes below a rimrock cliff. They were moving slowly forward. Two had sixguns, the front one a saddle rifle. The fourth man was crawling away down the slope. He seemed to be wounded.

About the same distance to the right of the post line another man—just one, so far as the Kid could see—lay behind another big square rock. He too, was on his belly, but cocked up on his left elbow. The Kid could see black whiskers. In his right hand was a sixgun. When the Kid first looked over this one was lying still as the others advanced. The Kid could see them all. He could see too, that the three could not see the one, nor the one the three.

"Could it be," whispered the Cabresto Kid softly to himself, "that these boys is aimin' to shoot one another? Four against one? Or are they huntin' a lost rabbit?"

They were not hunting a lost rabbit. The lone man at the right began slowly to edge toward another boulder.

"Krr-raww—krr-aw—kaw!"

A raucous raven squawk sounded harsh and loud above them, unnaturally close. As if instinctively, every one of the crawling men suddenly stopped and looked up. But they saw no raven.

"Krr-raw — krr-aw!" The Kid grinned and repeated the squawk. It was the call of a raven with a feast of fresh blood in immediate prospect. For a second the crawling men remained motionless.

"Maybe that'll remind 'em," thought the Cabresto Kid, "what happens to a feller if he's shot an' left layin'. I wish I knowed who's who in this fight—an' for why."

But he had neither method nor time to find out. His perfectly imitated raven squawk stopped them for but a second. In the next jiffy the lone *hombre* at the right squirmed to a flat boulder and crouched behind it. At the same instant the leader on the left, the one with the rifle, made a swift shift that brought him almost up against the cliff wall directly below the Kid and not more than twenty feet away. Here he came up to a crouch and slowly raised his rifle. Suddenly the Kid realized that this man, himself still unseen, had the lone enemy spotted. He was edging his gun up craftily, sighted and ready to shoot.

The Cabresto Kid made a quick decision. From where he lay he could pick off any of them he might choose. But it was none of his fight. He hated the idea of plugging a total stranger, especially when he didn't know what

the fight was about. But he hated worse to lie still and see a man pot-shot like an unsuspecting fool quail, with the odds against him.

All at once the Kid made a quick, silent movement. He rose to his knees. For a second he was in plain sight, but not a man looked up. Then, like a flash of lightning, his slim *maguey* rope swished swiftly down over the cliff edge. The shrinking loop in the end of it caught suddenly and surely over the raised rifle barrel. Even as it caught, the Kid ducked back out of sight, but as he ducked, he yanked the rope, sharply and hard.

Down below, the carbine leaped from surprised hands as if it were a thing alive, banging off harmlessly as the trigger came free of the man's fingers. The next second it came clanking up the face of the rimrock as the Kid took in his slack. The sound of startled voices followed it.

Safely out of sight above the ledge, the Cabresto Kid spoke now for the first time.

"Now then," he said, quietly and lying a little as he figured the circumstances warranted, but plenty loud to be heard, "you three crawlin' coyotes holster them guns an' clear out, *pronto!* We got a gun a-piece pointin' straight at the gizzard of each an' ever' one of you—with a couple more to spare, an' the next shot from up here won't be no harmless rope loop!"

"Who the hell—" began one of the three hombres, but the Kid interrupted.

"No matter who!" he snapped out sharply. "But when I count ten—on the trigger boys?"

A series of grunts seemed to answer him from along the cliff rim.

"Right! An' don't miss! Now when I count ten—"

"Come on Johnny!" growled a voice down below. "The buzzards have got us trapped like rats in a mud hole. We got to scoot. But keep down. Be jest like Keene, to plug us in the back if he—"

The rest of his words were lost in the scuffling noises of boots on a rocky hillside as the three *hombres* began to move. The Cabresto Kid ventured a peek over the edge. To his left, slantwise down the hill, skulking swiftly from boulder to boulder, the four hombres were retreating. The last of them, as young and lank and almost as tall as the Kid himself, stopped where the others had disappeared into the juniper thicket over the next bench. He stood suddenly erect, whirled around and faced the cliff. He didn't shout, but his quiet, even voice carried clearly up to the Kid's ears, nor was there any of the strained quality of fear in it.

"You win, Keene," he said, "this time. But if that fence goes up—just look out for the next!"

PLAINLY the man could not see to whom he was talking, but to the Cabresto Kid it was also clear that Keene, if that was the name of the lone hombre to the right of the post line, could see the speaker, for he had his big .45 lined through a rock cleft and was taking careful and deliberate aim.

The man he had just saved from a pot shot was now about to do some pot shooting himself.

"Hey, Whiskers! Look out!" yelled the Kid sharply. Then as he saw that the *hombre* didn't mean to pay him any heed, he snapped out his own six shooter and sent a bullet whanging off from a rock a few feet from the hombre's boot heels. And in the half second that the Kid's shot upset the whiskery one's attention, the other man turned and disappeared into the thicket of juniper on below.

The Kid stood up now, in plain sight on the rim. The black whiskered *hombre* scowled up at him, his pistol still out and threatening. But either the Kid's broad sunrise grin or else the fact that his right hand hovered near the ivory butt in his holster kept him from raising it further.

"Say, Mister Whiskers Keene, if that's your name," the Kid called down pleasantly, "what the hectorino do you call this country anyhow—Pot Shot Basin? Don't nobody fight no way around here exceptin' from behind big rocks? Now, where I come from—"

"Where's that?" Keene still scowled up at him.

"Oh, places," answered the Kid. "Places where men are men until they die, an' all the waterholes are dry. An' if you ask me, my name's the Cabresto Kid, tryin' to trail me up a job. If you don't ask, it's the same."

"Job?" Keene's sullen voice perked up with a note of interest. "How many with yuh?"

The Kid laughed.

"Believe it or not, I'm alone."

"But—but I heard—"

"What you heard," averred the Cabresto Kid, "was your imagination. Plain ol' bluff, see? I got my horse back there in the trees—an' that's all."

"Looky here, Kid," said Keene, "yuh mentioned a job. I could use a smart guy. But git yer hoss an' circle around down here where we kin talk. My neck's gittin' stiff augurin' up this away at yuh. Trail's to your right."

"Bueno," replied the Kid. "Give me a jerk an' two jiffies an' I'll be down."

He turned and disappeared into the timber toward his horse.

"Mex, ol' pony," he confided. "We may have to grow whiskers, but it looks like we're hired. Giddap!"

As he came joggling down the steep trail he heard the hoof clatter of riders coming up from somewhere below the next bench. The noise sounded like plenty of them—and in a hurry. But he did not meet them on the trail. They had turned off to the left on the bench just under the rim, toward where the black whiskered Mr. Keene awaited him. As a consequence, the Kid listened for more shooting. He heard none. Nevertheless he approached his rendezvous with Keene cautiously.

The caution was needless, for the newly arrived horsemen were Keene's own men. There were six of them, and Keene was bawling them out for not having been there an hour ago when they were needed. They were a hard looking bunch, and they took their bawling out sullenly. All but one of them, a heavy legged, bull-necked, chunky, red faced hombre, who merely grunted out a short laugh and told Keene to shut up, then turned and jerked his square chin toward the Kid as he rode up.

"So this is him, eh?" he grunted. Then to the Kid in a voice that was half snarl, half sneer: "Howdy, Fishpole. The ol' man tells us yuh been doin' some hero business 'round here—only yuh done it on both sides of the fence. First yuh stop McGuire's coyotes frum pluggin' the ol' man, then yuh jump in an' stop the ol' man frum crackin' down young McGuire. Who the hell are yuh fer, anyhow? Come on, speak up!"

"Well," the Kid gave the burly one eye for eye as he drawled, "if a gentleman should ask me, I'm for "Billy in the Lowlands," whiskey straight, an' "Hell Among the Yearlin's." But about this here ruckus, which I take to be a Keene-McGuire fence feud—I kinder stepped into it by accident an' I ain't got no dog in the fight. I'm neutral."

"Neutral?" The chunky red-face grunted a short, derisive laugh. "In Boney Horn Basin they ain't no neutrals! I'm askin' yuh, smart boy, which—"

"In that case," broke in the Cabresto Kid, his jaw muscles tightening as he rode a little closer, "I reckon I'll choose whichever side that don't claim you, Brother Bull-Neck!"

He started to rein his horse around to leave, but the black whiskered Keene stepped ahead of him.

"Wait a minute, Kid," he said. "Bull Maffy ain't ramrodin' this spread. In fact, beginnin right now, he ain't even on the payroll—not no longer. I've had enough of your loafin', your bull-dozin', beefin' an' bossin', Bull. Yuh're fired! An' boys, meet the Cabresto Kid—that takes his place!"

"Him?" snorted Bull Maffy. "Keene, yuh're a damned old fool! But never mind, yuh'll choke on yer own cud—firin' me to take on a seven foot sucklin' yuh ain't never even saw before! Why, I'll bet yuh my hoss that this sniggerin' fishpole ain't got the guts of a rabbit! I know the kind, Keene. They're all—"

"Put 'em up, Maffy, *pronto!*"

The hollow voiced command seemed to come from directly behind Bull Maffy, almost at his very ears. At the same time the Cabresto Kid's lumpy Adam's apple moved up and down in his lean neck. Bull Maffy whirled around to face—nothing. The instant that his back was turned a tight loop of the Kid's *maguey* rope shot out, caught the holt of the big *hombre's* low swung sixshooter, and yanked it from the holster. Casually the Kid took up his slack and pulled the gun to him. By the time Bull Maffy realized what was happening, the Kid had emptied the gun. He pocketed the cartridges and tossed the .45 back to its owner. Amid the snickers of his erstwhile *compadres*, Bull Maffy, his ruddy face puffy with helpless anger, holstered it, swung to the saddle and rode away.

"Now Mister Keene," drawled the Kid, "if the duties suits me, I reckon I'm yer new hand!"

HIS FIRST assigned duty did not especially suit him, but he decided to stay with it for a day or two, anyhow, and see what turned up. The job was to take a wagon and haul barbed wire. The wire, Keene explained, was used stuff, salvaged from old fences and piled in big coils at a point on an old wood road some five miles from the KK ranch house. It was to be used on the new fence up to the rimrock. That was about all he did explain, too. He said not a word about any Keene-McGuire feud, fence fight or other phase of the situation in Boney Horn Basin. The only suggestion of trouble that he made at all was to advise the Kid to carry his gun on the wagon and keep his eyes open.

Keene had left his men at work on the post line up toward the Rimrock and brought the Kid on down and eastward to the helter-skelter layout of buildings at the ranch, where a Mexican cook set out dinner for them. After the meal Keene helped him hitch up.

"Say, Whiskers," the Kid protested, did I hire out as a cow hand—or a freighter?"

Keene scowled at him, then a snaggle-toothed grin showed through his whiskers.

"You stay with us, Kid," he said, "till this fencin's done, an' you'll git plenty chance fer ridin' an' that fancy ropin' of yours—afterwards. Jest hold yer 'tater."

The Kid hadn't liked Keene at first, and he didn't like him any better now. Just why he had let himself in to work for the old coot he didn't know. He hadn't exactly meant to, but something —probably a sense of adventuresome curiosity more than anything else—had made him do it—against his better judgment. So he kept his mouth shut and climbed on the wagon.

Like any cowboy in strange country, the Cabresto Kid, as he drove, took note of the country. The little used road slanted westward, from one grassy draw or flat to another through scrub juniper and pinon. It was good cow country. Although he had come through one gate, the Kid supposed he was still on KK ranch land. He was still east of the new post line, but he noticed that the few white faced cattle he passed in the draws or lyin on the low ridges under broad-branched junipers, bore another brand. It was sort of a three leafed clover or shamrock figure on the right shoulder.

About four miles from the KK ranch, which stood at the foot of the steep slope below the rimrock, another road, somewhat more used than the one he followed, cut in slantwise from the west on his right and continued down a draw to his left. There must be another ranch house somewhere nearby. From here the Kid could look back with a pretty clear view of the rimrock. He spotted the place where he had come over it—into this puzzling mix-up—early that morning.

About a dozen yards after he had crossed the other road he suddenly heard voices off to his right. They sounded excited. He jerked rein to a stop and listened.

"Why, yuh damn little wil' cat!" growled an angry, throaty male voice. "I'll make yuh listen to me! I tell yuh I'm not——"

It was a girl's voice that interrupted him, a quiet, vibrant voice, well controlled, but charged with fear nevertheless.

"Come another step, Bull Maffy," it said, "and I'll shoot! Don't you dare try to touch me! I'll—I'll—"

The words became almost shrill with terror.

With the swiftness of a jumped buck deer the Cabresto Kid leaped from the wagon and ran up through the junipers. At the forks of a trail with the other road he came upon them. The girl stood in the middle of the road, a trim, slender, figure in a gray shirt, blue Levi's and boots. Her right hand held a small pistol, pointed waveringly in the direction of Bull Maffy. Bull had the reins of two horses, his own and hers, in one hand. The other held his gun. Plainly he did not believe she would shoot, and was maneuvering to get hold of her.

"I tell yuh I've done quit him," he was protesting. "An' if yuh'll jest be reasonable an' treat me nice instid of drawin' guns on me, I'll throw in with yuh an'——"

"Mister Maffy," drawled the Cabres-

to Kid, suddenly stepping out between the two. "Climb on your hoss an' git!"

The Kid's gun was not drawn, but as Maffy, in the confusion of surprise, started to bring his up as if to shoot, the Kid's seemed almost to leap out of its holster into his hand. Facing it, Bull Maffy hesitated, scowling. Then he dropped his gun into its holster and turned to his horse. As he swung up he laughed harshly and without mirth.

'Well, if it ain't our hero!" he said mockingly. "Jumped the fence agin! Is there any rock or tree around here that you ain't behind?"

"Drift!" said the Kid.

"Since you're here to entertain the lady," grunted Maffy, "I reckon I will, fer the present, anyway. Next time yuh ————, I'll see yuh first!"

"Maybe," said the Kid. He watched in silence while the big *hombre's* fat red neck disappeared down the road, then he turned to the girl. He noticed that she had wide gray eyes, almost blue, and yellow hair with the fire of gold in it. His broad, sunrise grin brought an answering smile from her.

"Here's your hoss, ma'am," he said, and led it forward. He suddenly felt very bashful. The girl grasped his hand and gripped it tight for a brief instant. Behind her smile of gratitude she looked troubled, worried. There were blue-black circles under her eyes.

"I—I don't know how to thank you," she said. "But I'm afraid you've made a dangerous enemy. Bull Maffy—"

"Maybe I have," said the Kid conscious of a peculiar scooting up and down of his knotty Adam's apple, "but maybe I've made a friend, too."

"You certainly have," said the girl warmly. "I wish my brother were here to thank you, too, Mister—"

"They call me the Cabresto Kid."

"Mister Cabresto Kid, then. Our place—the Shamrock—it's right up the road a piece. If you'll just stop by sometime when brother is here, you won't find the McGuire's ungrateful! Maybe you'll come up now?"

McGuire's! The Kid felt sudden misgivings.

"I—why, I—if you'll excuse me ma'am," he stammered, "my—my team might run off. I—I'd better be goin' on. I—I don't think Maffy will be comin' back. I—"

Still stammering, he turned and strode back toward his wagon, hidden beyond the junipers. Riding on up toward the house, Betty-Jo McGuire thought she heard a quail whistle in the junipers. Actually it was the Cabresto Kid, letting off steam.

"Boy," he told himself, "you shore are on the wrong side the fence now!"

IT WAS sixty yards or more to his wagon. Within twenty of it he heard a horseman coming at a gallop up the road. Bull Maffy coming back? He ran out to the road. A slim, brown skinned, familiar looking young puncher nearly as tall as the Kid himself, jerked sudden rein before him. His resemblance to the girl was too striking to miss. But the look in his gray eyes was cold and hostile.

"You driving that KK team back there?" he snapped without any preliminaries. "Well, climb on it now, and clear out, savvy! You're a stranger I take it an' maybe you don't know it, but you got no business in here. Get out —an' the next time I catch you this side of Boney Horn ridge, I'll shoot you on sight!"

"But listen here, *hombre,*" began the Kid, "I—"

"Shut up!" snapped McGuire, "An' travel!"

The Kid's eyes narrowed. For half a second the muscles of his right arm twitched to reach for his gun. He knew

he could get to it first, for the other's horse was prancing and restless. But something about the straight-gazing, honest grayness of those eyes made him change his mind.

He grinned, shrugged his shoulders and travelled.

He found wire where Keene had told him he would, and loaded up a wagon full, puzzling over the part he should play in this Boney Horn fence war. By the time he started back with his load he had made up his mind to work two or three days for Keene for the few dollars he might need before he could hit another job, then drift on before he got tangled up in things.

"Fightin's O. K., young feller," he told himself, "when you know the who, what, when, why an' wherefores, but

thisaway—it's like a hornet's nest in the dark; you never know where the next sting is goin' to land, an'—wup!"

A rider had appeared all at once in the road ahead, coming toward him. It was the McGuire girl. The Kid could not help noticing how well she sat the saddle. He drew rein and put on his broad sunrise smile.

"Hello, Miss McGuire! I didn't expect—"

"Evidently not." The girl's voice mixed chilliness and anger. "Isn't Keene satisfied to murder our father and rob us of our land, without stealing our own wire to fence it with?"

"Why—why listen here, ma'am, let me explain. I didn't know—"

The girl's little pistol was suddenly in her hand, covering him. Her face was white with determination.

"You can't explain to me! You're driving Keene's wagon—that's enough! And now you will please take that wire right back where you got it—quick! If you don't, I'll—I'll shoot you!"

It was the Kid's turn now to get mad. If she had told him decently that it was McGuire's wire he was hauling and asked him to return it, it would have been different. But to have that popgun poked in his face, without giving him a chance to explain things! It got a man's goat! Well, you couldn't fight back at a woman, but he'd be damned if he'd let her bluff him. She wouldn't have the nerve to shoot—and if she did she'd probably miss. Or would she? That small hand looked fairly steady.

Nevertheless the Cabresto Kid did not turn the team around.

"Sorry I can't oblige you, ma'am! Giddap!"

The team moved forward. Surprise seemed to paralyze the girl for a moment. He was already past her, his long back to her before she even found her voice.

"Stop! Stop, or I'll—I'll have to shoot!"

"Giddap!"

He didn't stop. He did not even look back. And the girl, almost to his own surprise, did not shoot. For a few yards he heard the hoofs of her horse as she

followed the wagon. Then he heard her no more. Finally he looked back. There was no one in sight. He let out a whistle —the queer vibrant whistle of a cock quail.

"Young feller," he told himself, "you've shore jumped into the bog now!"

The Cabresto Kid was experiencing a rather new sensation. He was mad—mad through and through—and mostly at himself. What had he jumped into this mess for in the first place?

He found old man Keene himself at the ranch cabins. He came out finger-combing his black whiskers, grinning broadly.

"Got a load, eh? Good boy!" he exclaimed approvingly. "Unload it over by that shed."

The Kid swung his long legs around and stepped off the wagon instead.

"Keene," he said, "I want the straight of this fence business—talk turkey!"

"Sure," said Keene. "It's plumb simple. I've bought the title to some land—an' I'm fencin' it, see?"

"A little bird told me," drawled the Kid, "that the murder of a man named McGuire had somethin' to do with it."

Keene scowled. Then he rubbed his whiskers and grinned again.

"Yuh might ask Bull Maffy about that, Kid. 'Course I ain't noways responsible fer what Bull Maffy does. But looky here, I don't hire a man to ask questions, an' them that gits too nosey—well, I have to fire 'em see? I'm jest a honest ol' man, tryin' to git along an'—"

"So," interrupted the Kid, dryly, "is a skunk in a chicken coop. An' as fer this firin' business—I've done saved you the trouble. I've quit! An' the next time anybody pulls down on you frum behind a rock—well, as far as I'm concerned, let 'em pull."

"Wait a minute! Yuh've got the same mud on yer boots as the rest of us now. Yuh cain't quit! Yuh got to—"

"Try an' stop me!"

The Kid got his horse and saddled up. Old man Keene snorted and scowled and stormed about, but that was all. The Kid swung up to the saddle.

"*Adios,* Blackwhiskers," he called back as he rode off down the slope in the gathering twilight. "An' may you choke on your own cud!"

PRESENTLY he could hear, back up the rimrock trail, the hoof noise of Keene's men coming down — evidently from work on the fence. Maybe the old coot would send them on to put him out of the way permanently. Plainly Keene was plenty sore. Doubtless had figured to use him for his dirty work to the limit. Well, he'd figured wrong. The Kid waited a while, listening. But he heard nobody following on.

At the crossroads below McGuire's place he hesitated a moment, then took the left hand as being the most likely to lead on out of the Basin. He meant to drift. A quarter mile farther on he heard hoof sounds. He was out in the bright moonlight of a grass flat when he heard it. He turned quickly toward the side timber. He'd had his stomach full of trouble for one day.

Pow! Pow! Fire flashed from the juniper shadows ahead. Like a felled tree the Kid's horse crumpled under him and fell on his side. He kicked a little and then lay still. The Kid lay still, too. He had half a leg caught under the dead horse, but otherwise he was unhurt. He managed to ease the leg out without rising.

"That," he reflected, "would be Bull Maffy—an' if he'll jest step out to see how dead I am—"

The Kid had his sixgun ready, but nobody came out of the shadows. He

heard the sound of galloping hoofs. His assailant had shot and run.

An hour or so later, the Cabresto Kid, keeping in the tree shadows off the road, now that he was afoot, suddenly caught his chin on the smooth wire of a clothesline. It set him back, sprawling. A muffled dog bark answered the noise he made. Then he saw the black shadows of a small cabin hidden in a clump of junipers. It was dark. Its door opened and a man in his underwear appeared.

"Who's there?" It was a cracked, high pitched, nasal voice, a startled voice trying to sound stern.

"Mister," called the Kid, "what's left of me's plumb harmless. I must of hit your clothesline."

His voice must have sounded reassuring, for old Trapper Tom Darden not only invited him inside, but also stirred up the fire and made him some coffee.

"Hit's right much of a pleasure," said old Tom, "to meet hup with a stranger in this Basin that hain't mixed hup in this 'ere Keene-McGuire fight."

"I'll say it is," grinned the Cabresto Kid, rubbing his bruised leg ruefully. "Jest what is the what about that fight, anyhow? I can't get the straight of it?"

Obligingly old Tom told him.

"Hit's simple damn hellishness," he said. "Bull Maffy wanted hol' McGuire's gal, an' hol' Keene wanted his land, an' hol' McGuire an' the boy, Johnny, stood 'em both off. So, the way I figger hit anyhow, Bull Maffy, under Keene's orders, 'e hup an' kills hol' McGuire. An' 'e does hit the day ol' McGuire is on his way to the county seat to redeem his land frum overdue taxes, so when 'e don't git there, all hol' Keene has got to do is jest buy in the land fer the taxes—a plumb legal swindle. But Maffy, him a-gettin' the gal hain't quite so easy. Neither is hol' Keene goin' none too fast fencin' off the land. Young Johnny, 'e's a-fightin' 'em—him an' three cowboys—two now, I reckon. Ye see, this mornin' they had a battle an' one got wounded. They was jest about to take hol' Keene, but seems like 'e had a whole dang regiment ambushed a-top the rim an' one of 'em looped Bill Maudsly's gun, an'—well, they was plumb covered an' had to pull out. An' now Johnny McGuire's done sent his two remainin' *hombres* to try to round up more 'elp so 'e kin tackle 'em agin. I aim to join 'em in the mornin'. If we could jest lay out Bull Maffy an' hol' Keene hisself, the rest would scatter like rabbits. But—I reckon hit ain't much chance, not anyways unless—"

The Cabresto Kid got suddenly to his feet. He no longer felt tired. His mild eyes shone in the yellow lamplight with the sharp, cold gleam of determination.

"Mister," he said earnestly, "you got a horse?"

"Why, yes, but—"

"I ain't got time to explain, mister. When I hit here a while ago I was on my way outa this Basin. But now I ain't. I've got a mighty big wrong to set right first—an' I can't do it afoot. Bull Maffy shot my horse from under me an hour ago. Look at me good—can you trust me?"

"Son," said the old Trapper, reaching up to lay a gnarled hand on the Kid's shoulder, "hit hain't reasonable, but I'm a-goin' to do it. Jest take another biskit an' some coffee while I bring up the mare."

Ten minutes later the Cabresto Kid was on Trapper Tom's rangy black mare, bareback.

Old Trapper Tom cleared his throat.

"I hain't nosey, son," he said apologetically, "but is hit hol' Keene yuh're after, or Bull Maffy?"

"Both," replied the Kid grimly, "an' any other hell I run into!"

"Then son, 'ere's a tip. Hol' Keene

sometimes sleeps at night—in the middle cabin. Bull Maffy don't. He rides. Luck to yuh, an' may yer loop never twist!"

THE KID rode by his dead horse to get his own saddle and rope. Then, up through the black moon shadows of juniper and pinon, he took the road for the KK ranch cabins. A quarter mile from them he turned deep into a juniper thicket and waited, sleeping a little. When the stars told him it was nearing midnight he went on.

He left the black mare tied in the thicket and pussy-footed carefully around the edging of trees toward the cabins at the foot of the steep rimrock slope. His light *maguey* rope was looped over his left shoulder. His gun hung low at his hip.

The cabins were dark and silent. The Kid reached the back wall of the middle one noiseless and unheard. Stooping, he circled it until he found the door and a low window. They were on the south side, whitened by a clear flood of moonlight. His own bulk loomed black and dangerously visible. He got under the window and felt up over the sill. It was open, a few inches, from the bottom. He rose up and listened. His ears caught the sound of slow, heavy breathing inside. Evidently Keene was asleep.

The Kid stepped to the door. He turned the knob and pushed. The locked door creaked, the latch made a slight clicking noise. Abruptly the tempo of the breathing inside changed and in another second he heard a man's feet thump softly on the floor. The Kid's Adam's apple moved up and down, as he stepped back to one side of the door. Slowly a low throaty sound, like the growling of a dog began to come from his half open mouth. Another growl, slightly different answered it. The next second there arose in the night air a snarling, slathery noise like two dogs fighting in front of the cabin door. The Kid, without letting up on his perfect imitation of a dogfight, reached out and bumped the door with his fist. He made scuffling noises on the hard ground.

For a moment nothing happened. He

let his dogfight lull, then start up again. Then, inside the cabin a voice cursed. The next second the door swung open and a man in his underwear stepped out, none too cautiously.

"Yuh damn stray mutts," he snapped, "git to hell—"

Swish! The Kid swung his small fast loop, and as it caught the man's left foot, he yanked. The man went down like a hoolihanned calf, and in a flash the Kid was upon him, his right hand working the rope to tie him. His left clapped smartly over the fallen man's mouth. Involuntarily the Cabresto Kid swore, for the face his fingers touched was smooth—no whiskers! He had caught the wrong man.

Nor was that all. At another cabin he heard a door slam, then the sounds of somebody running toward him. A flash of gun flame reddened the moon-

light. More men were coming now. The Kid yanked his rope free and leaped around the cabin corner. Here he whirled for a tenth second and fired. The first figure running toward him fell flat at the shot, but kept on coming at a swift crawl. He had missed. The Kid fired again. The man suddenly lay still. The others jumped for the cover of trees and kept shooting. They knocked bark from the cabin logs into his face.

Back of the cabin, juniper thickets blackened the steep slope. The Kid ran around the cabin to make for their cover. Suddenly, as he rounded the corner, a black figure leaped at him from the shadows. A gun spat flame almost in his face. The Kid felt the bullet sear the side of his face. Swift as lightning, he answered it, and the bulk of a man's body fell almost at his feet.

Like a fleeing panther the Kid leaped up the steep slope to the cover of the junipers. He felt dazed, but in his heart was a certain grim contentment. In the flash of his gun he had seen the last fallen man's face. It was a thatch of black whiskers. In his heart the Cabresto Kid knew that old man Keene would build no more fences.

IT WAS hours later that the Cabresto Kid circled widely back to the black mare where he had left her and rode on down the Basin.

It was gray dawn at the road forks below the McGuire place. The Kid hesitated. He had news for the McGuires. Should he risk being shot at to take it? His reason told him to drift right on eastward, plumb out of Boney Horn Basin. But deep inside he knew he wouldn't—not while Bull Maffy was still at large—maybe not even after that.

He reined the black mare up toward the McGuire place. He rode straight up to the house. Every second he expected to be halted. A cavalcade of riders suddenly appeared behind him, coming at the gallop. The Kid dismounted and stepped to the porch. He heard hurried footsteps inside.

"Young feller," he told himself, "you're a trapped coyote, now!"

But he was mistaken. The door swung open. Involuntarily the Kid ducked to one side, but when he looked he felt a sudden relief. The gray-eyed girl in the doorway was smiling. Behind her appeared the kindly face of old Trapper Tom Darden.

"Come in, quick!" said the girl, "while I explain to the boys."

For suspicion rode the faces of the riders now approaching the porch.

Inside Johnny McGuire lay on a couch with a bandaged bullet wound in his leg. He put out his hand to the Kid. Old Tom pointed to McGuire's wound.

"Bull Maffy's last shot on this earth!" he grinned. "An'—"

Betty Jo McGuire and the new arrivals came crowding into the room.

The Cabresto Kid put on his sunrise grin.

"An' this," he touched the bloody line on his own jaw, "was the last fer ol' man Keene! An' now, if somebody'll stake me to a horse, I reckon I'm paid up here in the Basin—I'll drift."

A light hand touched his arm. Betty-Jo McGuire smiled up at him gravely.

"We have no horses for drifters," she said. "But for a tall man to ride for the Shamrock *here in the Basin*—well, he could ride your string for a while anyway, couldn't he Johnny?"

THE END.

Two of a Kind

By JAMES H. HULL

"YOU'RE so crooked you could hide behind a cork-screw!" Carl Embers roared. Every inch of his slim figure trembled with rage, and the down-turned corners of his too-small mouth lost something of their mouse-like meekness.

"The same to you and many of 'em," Ben Houser returned. And a steady pair of wide-set eyes, under a broad, receding, slightly wrinkled forehead, stared back the bitter accusation.

The cabin was quiet, save for the battle of words that went on inside. A partnership was about to be dissolved. Carl Embers, small, somewhat delicate, and usually too silent, was for once speaking his mind. And Ben Houser, coarse-grained and blustering and spontaneous, was for once keeping his temper and taking abuse with uncanny stoicism. Neither of the former partners had much more to say. They were broke, and that settled it. They had sunk a shaft one hundred feet. They had done enough excavation work to make a paying mine of it. But the gold was simply not there. There had been sun-

dry misdealings. And now, Carl Embers was blaming his partner for the failure.

"You're crooked," Carl Embers repeated. "If I ever meet up with you again after today, I'll—I'll put the kibosh on whatever devilish trick you happen to be up to at the time."

"Say, lemme tell you somethin' about yourself," Ben Houser retorted. "You're a piker. You ain't got guts enough even to go crooked; say nothin' about goin' straight."

Carl Embers paced up and down the cabin, put on his hat and slicker, opened the door to go, and paused for a final retort. "You couldn't go straight, even part of the time. Wherever you go, it's always sure to be something ornery you're up to—all the time. I don't never want to meet up with the likes of you again. But if I ever do happen to meet up with you again, Mr. Houser, I'll put the kibosh on it!"

"Put the kibosh on what?" Ben Houser queried innocently.

And Carl Embers explained his threat more carefully. "If I ever meet up with you again, I'll find you doing whatever you happen to be doing at the time."

"Either that or something else," Ben Houser grunted.

"And it will be something crooked, because—"

"Oh! Because I couldn't do nothing unless it was crooked. That the idea?"

Carl Embers nodded. "And I'll put the kibosh on it, whatever it is." And he closed the door of the cabin.

Five years slipped by, and Carl Embers did not see nor hear of his former partner and sworn enemy in all that time.

DARKNESS and cold rain had already set in when Carl Embers left the main trail at the top of the ridge and urged his weary horse down the slope, under the black shadow of pines, to the cabin he and Ben Houser had once built and occupied. He was fifteen miles from home, and he considered it wise to stop here for the night.

It was everybody's cabin now. People came, camped, remained as long as they liked and departed, leaving the door unlocked and the latch-string dangling invitingly outward. Under the sprawling yellow-pine which partially sheltered the little log structure, Carl Embers dismounted, hung his saddle, saddle-pad and bridle in the tiny woodshed, and turned his horse loose to graze as he could wherever the bunchgrass was best.

Then he entered the cabin. He was cold and wet and hungry. He knew there would be supplies of some sort here, for only two months ago there had been a sack of flour, a little bacon, and some rice, in the substantial, mouse-proof box near the small but amazingly efficient stove. Those who came from time to time, helped themselves freely from the provisions box, frequently leaving more than they took, sometimes neglecting to leave anything, never packing anything away. The box was seldom empty. Such free-and-easy customs would, no doubt, be impracticable in some localities. But here, all men were honorable; somewhat. Even Carl Embers, sometimes at least, fancied that he was a person of high integrity.

Inside the cabin he struck a match. There was a candle on the table. He lit it. He blinked twice before his eyes became accustomed to the dim light. There were unwashed dishes. The stove was slightly warm. Somebody had been here recently. Then he saw who it was. On the narrow cot bed was a man whose brown, slender face, blackened with three weeks' growth of beard, was perfectly familiar. Those features had

been advertised in every post office, and there would be one thousand dollars in it for the man who gave information leading to his arrest and conviction. It was Clyde Black. But that was not all. Carl Embers knew Clyde Black as only miners can know miners. He and Clyde had been pals. They had camped together, been drunk together, been arrested together. But Clyde was now an outlaw. That would have to make a difference. And Clyde Black, if rumors could be credited, was now carrying somewhere about his person, the unheard-of sum of fifty thousand dollars; stolen money. That would be important, if true. Even the possibility that it might be true would have to make a difference.

The fugitive moved slowly to a sitting position, as the eyes of Carl Embers met his. A spontaneous ripple of the old-time understanding flashed into being, and almost instantly froze into an expression which resembled a tense question mark. All he said was, "Howdy, Carl. Well! Glad you come."

And Carl Embers said, "How are you, Clyde?

"Sure, it's me," Clyde muttered sullenly, as if he regretted the fact of his own identity. "Be you for me, or agin' me?"

"Eh? Why, I'm for you, Clyde." And Carl Embers tried to muster his wits to the grim task of presenting a clean-cut pretense of the old relation. " 'Course I'm for you. What do you think I am? Now don't you go suspectin' me of no—"

"Oh, you're all right," the outlaw protested. "I wasn't suspectin' you of nothing."

"Can I do anything? You up agin' it?"

"Yes, and yes," the outlaw admitted, almost cheerfully. "I am, and you kin. You c'n rustle a horse for me, so's I c'n git out o' this here at the first crack o' daylight. I had a pretty good cayuse, but he rolled off the trail and killed himself. Bruised me up a bit, too. That's why I holed up here, two—no, three days ago. Oh, I'll be all right. That is, if I c'n git a horse."

"I'll sell you mine," Carl Embers offered. "Might be a bit wore out tonight, but he's good for fifty miles tomorrow."

"What's he worth?"

"Oh, quite a lot."

Carl Embers was not pleased with the question of what his horse was actually worth. He felt that the price of the horse should be whatever the animal happened to be worth to Clyde Black at this particular time. Clyde seemed to think—he appeared to actually believe—that this pretense of friendship was genuine.

"I'll give you eighty dollars," Clyde offered.

"And the saddle ought to be worth—"

"Got my own saddle."

Carl Embers frowned inwardly, though outwardly he smiled. A friend of Clyde Black would probably sell him a horse right now for eighty dollars; a real friend would. And for the time at least he must continue to pretend to be one. But there ought to be something in it. He smiled more conspicuously. "Tell you what I'll do, old-timer. Make it eighty-two dollars and six bits, and I'll throw in the hackamore."

"Got a hackamore," Clyde bantered. "Eighty's all you git. And I'd like it if you'd fetch the horse down, first thing in the mornin'. I ought to git out o' this here place by five. While you're tendin' to that, right early, I'll be making breakfast for us."

Carl Embers tossed his rain-soaked hat into a far corner, removed his slicker, and deftly emerged from his black, bear-skin chaps. It would not be a comfortable night. "Got anything to eat around here right now?"

"I've et," the outlaw informed him. "There's some beans n'd things on the stove. I didn't hardly expect anybody for supper."

LONG before daylight, Clyde was up, lighting a candle and building a fire. It was then that Carl Embers discovered that the outlaw was practically helpless. With a badly sprained ankle, he could scarcely hobble about the cabin. He could not have walked a mile. Without a horse he must stay right here, and sooner or later give himself up. But he would not give up without a fight. Carl Embers knew him well enough to feel sure of that. And even with a sprained ankle and no horse, he would probably not be taken alive.

Long before daylight, Carl Embers put on his hat and slicker and found a short length of rope. "I'll go fetch the horse," he remarked casually.

It was still raining and still dark. On a nearby open slope, gray with sagebrush, the horse would soon be searching for bunchgrass. But Carl Embers had certain other plans. Instead of going in search of the horse, he stole around to the rear of the cabin, and keeping well back from the window, stood looking in. He knew he was not visible from the inside of the cabin. Clyde was bending over the stove, still having trouble with the fire, and his broad back was all that was visible. Embers reached for his automatic. He pointed it at the window-pane. He smiled silently at his own furtive reflections. This would beat going back on an old friend, for the reward would be only one thousand, while this might mean fifty times that amount. He discovered that his hands were trembling slightly. Then certain quaint apprehensions came thronging upon him. What if he should miss? Would the shot be immediately fatal? What if this man of iron should turn, and with a lightning draw, shoot straight? He did turn, slowly, looked straight toward the window, apparently saw nothing, and looked away again.

From sheer lack of physical courage, Carl Embers changed his plans. Perhaps it would be best to be looking for the horse. He suddenly realized that his very presence here at the rear window, with a gun in his possession, was compromising. If he should be discovered here there would be no mercy. He must sneak away in the darkness, and be hunting horses.

But something did happen which prevented him from going far. Up the trail two dim figures came prowling. Carl Embers could see their shadowy outlines as they approached the cabin. Then, as they flashed through the patch of yellow light from the front window,

he caught a glimpse of their faces. One of them was apparently an officer. He wore a badge, anyway. And the other was an old acquaintance and a one-time partner, Ben Houser.

Carl Embers crept back to the rear window. Curiosity prevailed over fear. With a sudden motion, the door burst open. Two reports roared out in the still night, so close together that they could not have been fired from the same gun. Less than a second later there came another report. That was all.

Carl Embers peered through the window again. One man had fallen, and lay quite still. It was Clyde Black, the outlaw. The sheriff, too, had been hit. That last shot had been fired by a man who had only two seconds to live. The officer was speaking rapidly. "Oh, it ain't nothing. Not hurt much. But—" He sank down on the couch and seemed to be struggling with faintness. "Fetch some water, Ben. Oh, I'll be all right after a bit, only—" And suddenly he seemed to lose consciousness.

Ben Houser did not bring the water, or pay much attention to the man who had fainted. Instead, he seemed to be going through the pockets of the fallen outlaw. From an inside pocket of the coat he drew out a bundle, opened it, took one look, and tucked the bundle into his own coat pocket.

Then Carl Embers understood. There lay the sheriff, not seriously hurt, but for the present totally unconscious of what was going on. And if unattended, it might be a long time before he came out of it. And Ben Houser was not helping him. Ben Houser was edging toward the door, watching him appraisingly, his eyes cold and spiritless. Suddenly Ben Houser grinned, and it was the grin of a wolf. Then, chuckling, he stalked calmly out of the door, and softly closed it.

CARL EMBERS understood perfectly. Ben Houser had gone somewhere to hide the money. He doubtless planned to leave it hidden a few months before he came back to get it. He would doubtless return to the cabin soon, apply first-aid to the sheriff, and help him in every way possible. Then, perhaps, he would assist the sheriff in looking through the clothing of Clyde Black, only to discover that the late Mr. Black had had no money at all about his person.

Furtively and noiselessly, Carl Embers cursed, in a low whisper. "He's at it again. He's up to something ornery. I knew he would be! He always

is! I said I'd put the kibosh on it, and I will. For just this one time in his life, he'll go straight!" Tense in the execution of a long-cherished purpose, Carl Embers followed from tree to tree, always keeping the dim figure of Ben Houser in view he had a flashlight in the pocket of his slicker. He would use that later.

Ben Houser did not go far. At the

dump of the old mine, he paused and looked carefully about. Then he fumbled in his coat pocket for a candle, lit it, poked the end of it into his hatband, and quickly disappeared down the shaft.

Carl Embers crept toward the old dump and peered down the shaft. At first there were sounds, but there was no light. "The ornery old sleuth! He's gone up the drift to hide it!" Carl Embers muttered. He felt sure the manway was still in good condition. He could climb down, even without a light; one hundred feet to the bottom. Silently he made his way down the old ladder, as he had done hundreds of times before. "I'll make him go st— make him figure this out a little different," he corrected. "Thinks he's got a secret. Thinks he's the only one that knows old Clyde had the money on him. I'll make him figure again. There's two of us in on this. There's him and there's me. He'll divvy or I'll know why not. For just this once, I'll make a *good* partner of him!"

Reaching the bottom of the shaft, he felt strangely faint and exhausted. And he was puzzled. If Ben Houser had gone up the drift, why was he so long getting back? Ben could have concealed the money in any number of good places. Even in the darkness, Carl Embers could remember exactly how the old mine looked. Some ten feet up the drift there would be an old powder box, with three sticks of giant powder still left in it. That would be a good place.

The air was suffocating, and he sensed a strange dizziness coming over him. He had been standing here a full minute, at least. Somehow he dreaded to move. With a quick resolution he snatched the flashlight from the pocket of his slicker and throwing a beam of light up the drift, moved on a few steps. There was the powder box. And there, close beside it, lay Ben Houser. The candle in his hatband had gone out. Now why should it go out? And why did Ben Houser lie there in the darkness?

"Gosh!" Carl Embers murmured. "It got him. And so thick a candle won't stay lit! Used to be some bad air here—remember now—just a little. Not enough to hurt anybody. But in five years it accumulated, and got so bad—gosh, I better get out o' this here!"

He was faint now, and weak. And yet he could think perfectly well. He was an experienced miner. He knew the nature of "bad air," had been caught in it more than once. It was not poisonous. It always sank to the lowest levels. It was, after all, only common ordinary carbon dioxide gas, so often found in the bottoms of mines, ancient wells, and natural cavities in the earth. Matches and candles would not burn in such an atmosphere. That was where Ben Houser had made his mistake. His candle had gone out, and he had groped around in the darkness until it was too late.

But a flashlight was always good. And there was that package, still clutched in the fingers of a man who no longer knew he owned it. Only ten feet away! He must have it. One quick dash, and it would be his. Then back to the shaft, and up. Only a short distance up, and the air would be fresh and pure. One breath of it would bring life back to his weakening limbs. He had already stayed here too long. One quick dash, and he would be out of it.

One quick dash! But every little motion meant a supreme effort. And he was weary, weary. The flashlight slipped from his listless fingers. There was the sound of glass breaking on rocks. There was darkness.

THE END.

The Yuma Kid, at that, went haywire. He drove his horse close against Jake Cullen's and his fist slammed hard in his employer's rugged face.

The Yuma Kid Rides

By WILTON WEST

THE MOON was directly overhead in the Santa Rita Hills country, that vast wasteland south of Yuma and close to the Sonora line, where Gila Monsters, mesquite and coyotes, horned toads and wild horses, long-horned cattle and two-gun men hiding out from the civilization, such as it was, that no deputy had yet been able to hold to law and order. And this is to say nothing of the sand waves which radiated furnace-like heat and drank up the few drops of water like a sponge. But under the bright light of the silvery moon it held a sort of weird glory of its own—awe inspiring, gripping.

The Yuma Kid, tall, bronzed and red haired, with laughing blue eyes under a worn, dust-stained old Stetson with a six-inch brim, chaps torn by thorns and rope work and wearing a plaid shirt much the worse for wear, expert puncher and bronk pealer, swung a long leg around the horn of his Myers' saddle,

let his reins hang loose and talked.

Hank Hall, lanky, gray-mustached, weather-beaten and wiry, withheld, his usual oracular lips shut and, listening, let his gnarled fingers smoothed over the butt of the gun he was cleaning with a string and a rag. Its two notches spoke of yesteryears, when singing lead formed part of every day's living.

THE FLYING J spread counted itself lucky to have both men on its big payroll. Hard riders of the wasteland and square from the backbone to the chest, doing four men's work with a laugh. They were waiting, now, for their turn at night hawking and Hank was just completing his cinching of a fresh mount.

"Kid," said Hank as he swung a dusty leg over his saddle and settled to ride for the herd, "Yo're young yit, but yo're shore growin' loco, listenin' tuh all these yere tales of lost mines 'round this ol' cow country. Ever since I war big enough tuh fork a saddle I been hearin' men *habla* thataway. Ain't nuthin' in it, a-tall. Done rode my ol' laigs most off, years ago, follerin' such lies. Men's died, in th' Santa Ritas, makin' plumb fools o' theirselves, huntin' lost gold."

They loped away for the herd, three miles down the valley, near one of the Flying J's water holes. Days of hard work lay behind them, rounding up the herd for the Fall shipment. The Yuma Kid's blue eyes, however, held that odd light of eager desire. Stories had reached him of one special locality in which was said to be a lost mine. His pulses had throbbed, as had those of other men. Down through Indian traditions the story had come, to become part of the history of the Yuma country.

"But mebbe they's truth in th' yarn, after all, Hank," the Kid mused as he flipped ashes from his cigarette. "An' besides, I've found somethin' over in them Santa Ritas what makes me blamed curious to hunt some more."

They were rounding an outcropping of rock as he spoke. Then their reins lifted and they stopped, for in the moonlight a rider was approaching, wearing a huge black sombrero and softly singing a range song. The brightly-colored pinto the man was on gleamed in the bright, silvery light. It was Jake Cullen, their boss and owner of the far-flung Lazy J. Behind him, a few yards, rode another man, dim in the light. As he rode up and stopped, it proved to be Buck Bronson, owner of the Split M outfit across the valley.

The two newcomers halted before the Yuma Kid and Hank Hall. Over the cantle of Jake Cullen's saddle hung a strip of fresh cow hide, its hairy side revealing a brand which had been blotched recently. The blood was hardly dry on it. Cullen and Bronson stared at the Yuma Kid and Hank with hard expressions, plainly troubled about something. Jake Cullen and Buck Bronson, both big, burly men, were cattle kings and fighters. When they looked that way it meant that something serious and out of the ordinary, had occurred. Usually they were placid men, with good natured wrinkles showing about the corners of their eyes—and beloved by all their riders. Square shooters, good bosses.

"Lookin' fer yuh, Yuma," spoke Jake Cullen gravely.

The Yuma Kid's blue eyes smiled. He tossed a leg around his horn, took out the makings. He loved these two big cattle barons, had ridden for both, though at present on Cullen's payroll. But he caught the flash in their eyes and wondered. They were looking at him in a strange, hard way.

"Yeah, Boss?" he queried quietly, wondering. "Hank an' me's headin' fer

th' herd. Been havin' our supper back by th' wagon. What's wrong?"

Jake Cullen eyed him gravely, took up the piece of hide and held it out.

"We found this over in Canyon Diablo, Yuma," he stated solemnly. "Somebody's been brand ventin' our cows."

Yuma gazed at the hide curiously. Expert at everything to do with cattle, the evidence was plain as he took the small bit of hide in his hands and studied the marks. He handed it back to his boss and his eyes twinkled innocently.

"Yeah?" he said quietly. "Rustlers gittin' busy again? Thought we'd 'bout cleaned this old range out o' them *hombres,* last year."

Gravely Jake Cullen and Buck Bronson studied his young, bronzed face with its square jaw and slightly upturned nose. Then Cullen drew out, from the pocket of his chaps, a blood-smeared hunting knife and held it up.

"Found this over thar, too, Yuma," he stated, his tone low but hard. "Yours ain't it?"

The Yuma Kid's eyes stuck out as he leaned forward in his saddle and looked at the knife. It was certainly the one he always carried. He had not known he had lost it. Had had no use for it for weeks. He usually kept it around his bunk, back in the bunk-house of the Lazy J, except when hunting. There had been no time for that recently, with the rounding up of the shipping herd.

"Shore, Boss!" he admitted. "Ain't seen it fer weeks." But he felt a sudden rush of amazement. Jake Cullen and Buck Bronson were watching him steadily, with eyes like steel. "But—but—yuh ain't—" he started.

"We are!" came the hard reply from Bronson. "Yuh've been seen over thar, nights, ridin' all alone. Was yuh figgerin' on runnin' what yuh vented across th' border an' sellin' 'em tuh some o' them dirty Greasers—or—what? We're askin' yuh!"

THE YUMA KID'S bronzed face turned almost black in the moonlight as the blood rushed into his face.

His eyes, laughing a moment before, swiftly focused on the two men's faces, with spark-like steelness. His lips, usually so open with the joy of living, clamped shut in a white line across his face. He swung down his leg, lifted his reins, rode closer and jerked down the brim of his old Stetson. Never in all

his twenty-eight years of range riding had men accused him like this!

Several more riders of the Flying J, accompanied by a couple from Bronson's Split M ranch, loped up, halted, sat gazing gravely at the Yuma Kid. Their faces were grim, lacking the usual comradeship he had always known. Fury swept him.

"It's a—lie!" he almost shouted. "Who found my knife, an' when? I ain't never been a dirty brand venter. Yuh've knowed me for. . . ."

A hard laugh, curt, mean, came from Bronson as he tied the piece of hide back on his cantle.

"I figgered he'd try lyin' outa it, Jake," he remarked to Cullen. Then he looked at the Yuma Kid almost savagely. "*I* found this knife, Yuma," he stated, "and I shot th' yearlin' what you'd jest vented. *I* cut out this hide! An' *I'm* th' man what seen yuh hangin' 'round over there, nights!"

The Yuma Kid's right hand fluttered. Fury was making him eager to draw, to shoot it out here and now. Brand venting! Stealing cattle! His anger surged hot and swift.

But Jake Cullen's low, steady voice was speaking.

"Neither our people nor Bronson's ever hold cows over there in Canyon Diablo, Yuma. Yuh knows that durned well. Never since we lost that last herd by bein' rustled 'crost th' line by them Mexicans we fought. Don't lie, Yuma," and his tone held a hardness Yuma had never before heard from his boss. "Bronson's got good eyesight—an' he seen yuh there."

The Yuma Kid blazed in his fury. "What th' hell yuh talkin' about, Boss?" he shouted angrily. "Our cows an' Bronson's has drifted everywheres, like they always does. Been cows over 'round that canyon ever since I've knowed this country. An' what's more . . . . I ain't been there! Th' man lies what says so!"

The Yuma Kid sat his saddle tense, ready, expecting the flash of guns. Calling the lie, in the cow country, generally brought swift gun-play. But both Jake Cullen and Buck Bronson sat still. Plainly, Bronson was willing Jake Cullen should be the one to do the rest of the talking. He had made his accusation and could afford to let Cullen handle the matter from now on; besides, he felt he had convinced Cullen of the Yuma Kid's guilt.

"It's no lie, Yuma!" Jake Cullen stated coldly, his gray eyes holding to the Kid's angry face. "An' what's more, Hank Hall yere has also been seen there—with *you!* But Buck an' me's agreed how tuh handle this thing. We're givin' yuh this one day tuh clear outa this country—an' stay out! Stay an' yuh'll . . . . hang, both of yuh!" But in his voice came a sort of break and his eyes softened a little. "Yuh're th' last two men I'd ever 'a' thought would steal from yore own boss. We been likin' yuh both, a heap. But . . . . th' facts is plain!"

The Yuma Kid settled stiffly in his saddle. He looked steadily at Buck Bronson. In that bronzed face he read deep hostility—victory! Bronson had never really liked him, he knew. A petty quarrel when the Yuma Kid had been working for Bronson, a year before, had grown into genuine dislike between them. The Kid had changed to the Flying J outfit.

"So it's *you* what makes these charges, Buck Bronson, is it?" came his hard voice. "Well, I tell yuh here an' now, to yore dirty face, ... yo're a damned liar, an' mebbe a thief yourself! What was *you* doin' over in Canyon Diablo? Tell me *that!* It's Flyin' J range—not yours."

But as both men's hands were drop-

ping toward their guns, Jake Cullen rode between them and held up a firm hand. His voice became sterner.

"Cut it out!" he demanded. "Kid. we're givin' you an' Hank Hall th' rest of this day to pull out and stay out. We don't want neither of yuh showin' no more low-down traits around here! Snake blood sickens me!"

The Yuma Kid, at that, went haywire. He drove his horse close against Jake Cullen's and his fist slammed hard into his employer's rugged face.

"Damn yuh!" he shouted. "If it wasn't that yuh've treated me square up to now I'd gun yuh, Boss," and his fist drove again into Jake Cullen's bleeding face. "Take that—an' that, an' if they's snakes here, it's you an' Buck Bronson!"

The heavy blows tumbled the big ranchman sideways, almost out of the saddle. Only by gripping the horn of his saddle did he remain on his mount. But he did not reach for a gun. Instead he fought back grimly and a heavy jaw blow jarred the Kid rockingly. Both men pulled their horses apart and, in an instant, the other riders were between them, holding each. Buck Bronson sat fingering his gun, his eyes narrowed on the Kid's face, waiting for him to draw. There seemed a devilish light in Bronson's eyes as he sat there. It was plain that he wished the Kid *would* draw.

"Boss," roared the Kid, fury rushing over him as he felt hands holding him still, "that statement ain't ever gonna die. I'll come back, an' you an' me'll finish this—with fists. It's one time I want tuh manhandle yuh plumb to dirt!" He jerked loose from the men's hands. "Yuh ain't wuth good powder. believin' Buck Bronson against me!"

Hank Hall laid a strong hand on the Yuma Kid's shoulder. His voice seemed to drawl, cool, calm.

"Kid, let's ride!" he suggested. "Looks like we ain't wanted 'round yere no more. But let's quit before somebody gits killed. We'll straighten this thing out, give us time." His gaze fixed on Buck Bronson's sneering face. "An' we'll be seein' *you* again, Bronson. I back th' Kids play—an' yo're a measly liar!"

Together they rode away. The other men behind them sat in stony silence. And the Yuma Kid was as erect in his saddle as though on parade. His head was up and his eyes looked ahead without shame.

THE flashing sunset was about the two men as they rode into Canyon Diablo. The Yuman Kid had insisted on going there at once, to look things over. He had not been there for days, and then only to hunt for strays. If cattle were now in the Canyon, then somebody had driven them there—close to the Mexican border where they could easily be stolen. The Kid's thoughts were tangled. The whole thing had come so suddenly, so unexpectedly. Branded as a rustler, as a thief, before his fellows!

Into the great, rugged canyon they rode just as the hills were purpling. The wide, grassy bottom had many cow trails and, in single file, they followed one, studying for sign. They found many cow tracks and it soon became evident that cattle had recently been there. The night closed slowly about them as they went on. Then the moon came up, silvery, bright. At the far end of the canyon they stopped, looking out at the great desert running southward into old Mexico. And here the tracks of cattle were increased a hundredfold, and the border fence lay cut in two wide places.

"Rustlers, they're callin' you an' me now, Hank!" the Kid gritted. "An' we've spent our lives killin' them hombres off!" A grim smile flitted across

his young face. "Snake blood, eh?" he cursed. "I'll make th' boss take that back, some day." For a long moment he sat silent, scowling. "Snake blood! That hits back tuh Dad; an' I'll even up that score."

An odd, sympathetic light came into old Hank's eyes. He laid one big, gnarled palm over the Yuma Kid's horn

"Kid," he said softly, "I hate tellin' yuh, boy, but they war rumors, afore yore father died. They was sayin' as how he war a rustler! Yuh wants tuh know th' straight of it, Kid, I think. An', ef so, I gotta tell yuh. They caught 'im an' some others with stolen stock. They hung th' rest. Yore dad got away, got back to yore home, an' died, as yuh knows, from that wound they give 'im—without tellin' yuh."

The Yuma Kid raised his head and his gaze fastened on Hank's lean, Indian-like face. Hank saw the blue eyes change into deep orbs of shocked sadness.

"God, Hank!" he murmured. "I wasn.' . . . . knowin' that."

Hank's big hand fell affectionately on the Kid's shoulders and a sympathetic smile lay on his rugged face.

"Well, son," he said quietly, "don't let it down yuh. My own father war shot usin' th' long rope; an' I wouldn't put it past Buck Bronson, neither."

Slowly, as they sat there watching the silver-toned desert, the Kid's expression changed into a new grimness. Again he raised his head and stared at old Hank.

"By gosh, Hank!" he exploded. "It never hit me before—'bout Buck Bronson's not likin' me none. That old quarrel when I was workin' for 'im wasn't nuthin', but he showed a heap o' feelin', an' ever since, sorta tryin' tuh git me tuh leave this here range." His hands gripped his horn until the knuckles stood out white. "But now I reckon I got an idea why he wants me gone." A grim laugh came. "He knows I've found it!"

Hank gazed at him in perplexity.

"Found what, Kid?" he asked.

"That old prospector's strike back in th' canyon, Hank. Remember that old story we was a-talkin' about? Them lost mines down here? Found it th' last time I rode over here, quite a while back. I was aimin' tellin' th' boss, but I wanted tuh come back first an' make sure I wasn't seein' things."

Old Hank laughed softly, slapped him on the shoulder.

"Kid, yuh seen nuthin'! These old hills is plumb stuffed with that pyrites of iron; an' you ain't th' first fella what's gone bughouse thinkin' it war gold. It's fooled me, many a time, set me tuh diggin' like an old fool, luggin' samples back tuh town fer them chemists tuh laugh at me."

But the Yuma Kid's eyes were gloomy. "I found real stuff, Hank," he replied in a low, tense voice. "You an' me'll go there tonight, an' if I'm right we'll lope back to th' Flyin' J an' tell th' boss. It'll prove to him that, with all th' gold I've found, I wouldn't have tuh do no rustlin' of his durned cows; an' it'll hawg-tie Buck Bronson because that last time I was over here I seen 'im beatin' it away in th' moonlight, ridin' low over his saddle like he didn't want nobody tuh see 'im."

Old Hank stroked his horse's mane, still smiling unbelievingly. He shook his gray head.

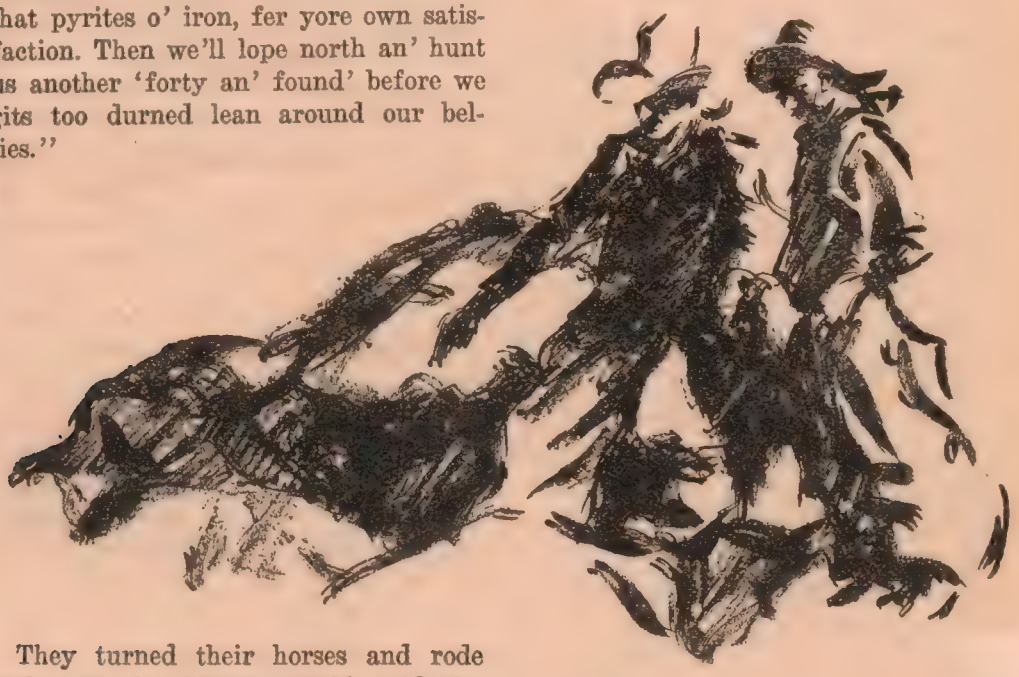
"Boy—boy!" he admonished. "Don't git believin' in miracles. All yuh saw was that pyrites o' iron. Yo're bankin' on somethin' that ain't never gonna turn out. They'll laugh at yuh, like they done me—an' hang yuh if they gits you again. Remember, too, Buck Bronson's a big cowman down here—plenty dinero and cows. We're jest orn'ry cow punchers. They'll take his word ag'in

ours, any time."

"But—" and the Yuma Kid's gaze held to his. "Will yuh go with me, tonight? If I'm right—"

Old Hank laughed, flung back his head in amusement.

" 'Course, Kid, I'll go with you," he replied. "Might's well ride one way as another, seein' we're outa a job fer th' time bein'. I don't mind showin' yuh that pyrites o' iron, fer yore own satisfaction. Then we'll lope north an' hunt us another 'forty an' found' before we gits too durned lean around our bellies."



They turned their horses and rode back into the Canyon Diablo, side by side, Hank amused and the Yuma Kid's blue eyes filled with tense suspense and a set faith.

THE Canyon Diablo was built by a mighty hand and in a mighty way. Gigantic, rugged. A mile wide at the bottom and even wider at the top, with almost vertical cliffs on each side, it formed a strangely well-made place for a bandit hangout. A thousand cattle and more could be held within its walls, then driven south into old Mexico at will. Not a road traversed it, for the bottom, while almost flat, was broken by deep, rocky arroyas which crossed it in half a dozen places. A sort of No-man's Land. Abysmal, silent, the haunt of mountain lions, of wolves, coyotes and rattlesnakes.

As a cool breeze came down it, the Yuma Kid left the cow trail they were following and headed straight for a smaller canyon to the right—a branch of the main canyon. For two miles he led the meandering way over rocks and cactus. And then it grew too black to go further. They unsaddled, tied their horses to mesquite bushes with their lariats and made camp. They agreed it would be better to wait until dawn.

"Cain't see my own hoss's ears, Kid!" old Hank had growled during the last mile. "Ain't never no moonlight can git away down yere, with all this durned brush an' scrub-oak."

But as the first streaks of dawn came they were riding again. Another two miles and Hank growled disgustedly.

"Kid, yo're gittin' us lost more'n more every durned minute. Ain't no six inches o' this ol' canyon what goes straight. We need one o' them airships,

or a nose like a hound."

But it was then that the Yuma Kid stopped, swung down and tossed his reins over a bush. His eyes were glowing.

"We're here, old timer!" he said with a ring in his voice which caused old Hank to stare at him anew.

The Kid led the way. Around and up they went for a hundred yards. Again he stopped and then pointed. Ahead was a large cave, twenty feet above the floor of the canyon. Cactus and mesquite grew thickly around the opening. But beside a stunted cottonwood stood a small, dilapidated adobe shack, almost concealed by the high brush. The roof had partly fallen in; and doors and windows were gone. A hitch rack, aged and broken, was before the house. An old, rusty shovel leaned against a wall of the shack, beside which lay a couple of equally rusty picks and a bucket. A pair of miner's boots, rotted and black from wear and exposure, hardened out of shape by the hot suns, hung from a wooden peg beside the doorway.

The two men made their way slowly, clambering over the rocks, avoiding the cactus, towards the shack. An hour's hard work and they had, by using the picks and the shovel, cleaned out a large hole at one side of the cave. There had been a hole, once, there, but time had almost covered it up. The Yuma Kid knew the spot, however, for before the almost hidden hole was an old pile of digging. And then both men suddenly straightened, stared with wide eyes. Old Hank let out a yell of amazement. Gold glittered in the rocks!

"Lord, Kid," he yelled, "yo're right! This ain't no pyrites o' iron. An' here I been a-ridin' this yere range fer years, without ever believin' an ounce o' gold was ever yere! I'd 'a' been diggin' my durned ol' arms off, ef I'd ever seen this!"

The Yuma Kid laughed happily. "Th' boss won't know how tuh excuse himself tuh us, after this, Hank, will he?" he cried in delight. "Ef we wasn't two honest hombres we'd stick here an' never let out a whoop."

SUDDENLY came the sounds of shod hoofs down the canyon. They rang out loudly over the rocks. And both men knew the sounds were coming from the direction in which they had left their own horses! Both darted for the opening, gripping their guns. They cautiously peered out. Buck Bronson and two other riders were coming along a cow trail, heading directly for the cave! And all three men were riding with their guns out and held high. Came Bronson's voice:

"Slow, boys! Let's git 'em when they shows up, whoever they are." A pause. Then, "Shoot fast, fellas, an' tuh . . . . kill! We ain't wantin' nobody tuh git away."

One of the other riders spoke: "Reckon we knows who they are, Buck," he said. "Their hosses is Flyin' J stuff; an' they look like th' ones Hank Hall an' th' Yuma Kid was a-ridin' when Jake Cullen fired 'em."

Buck Bronson jerked his horse to a halt. "Hell!" he stated loudly, gruffly, "I didn't notice that. Let's git down, quick, fellas. We'll stalk 'em like durned coyotes."

The Yuma Kid and Hank saw them tie up their horses behind rocks and then open out and come slowly forward, guns out. The two in the cave tensed, waited with grim faces. Then the Kid touched Hank's arm and whispered.

"Let's git back inside th' cave, Hank. We c'n watch 'em better. If they're here tuh git some more gold it'll shore cinch robbery on 'em flat. Let 'em git some. Then we'll hold up th' whole bunch an' drive 'em straight back tuh th' boss."

Getting into the cave was easy, for great bushes stood between the coming men and themselves. Once inside they watched again. Buck Bronson and his two companions, all riders of Bronson's ranch, strode forward with more and more assurance, reached the opening from which the Kid and Hank had just tossed the dirt. Then they stopped, staring. That somebody had just been digging here was, of course, plain. Bronson cursed and fingered his gun.

"Somebody's yere, all right, fellas!" he said. "Keep covered."

The Kid saw them sink down behind bushes. Then he saw their heads lift as the newcomers studied the cave and the hole. Then the heads ducked down again. Several minutes of absolute silence passed. The Kid wondered what Bronson and his men were doing. Then, suddenly, Bronson stood before the hole, gun in hand, gazing around warily. Then he turned back and called to his men:

"Come on out, fellas! Reckon them hombres has gone somewheres else. Ain't nobody here." His low laugh sounded. "Reckon they'll do a heap o' walkin', when they finds their broncs has vamoosed. Turnin' 'em loose war shore a swell idea."

The Yuma Kid and Hank lay flat behind a rock in the cave, from where they could see all three men. And for an hour Buck Bronson and his companions toiled at the hole. By that time they had filled several sacks with the ore and stood before the hole talking eagerly. Bronson was tossing up in one hand several small nuggets and his eyes were shining gleefully. Then the three men carried the sacks down to where they had tied their horses. The Yuma Kid straightened, motioned to Hank, and they both leaped out, guns flashing up.

"Stop, Bronson!" the Kid shouted. "Reach for th' sky!" He stepped slowly, warily forward. "Drop them sacks an' git back from yore hosses!"

But Buck Bronson and his men were fighters. They dropped the sacks, whirled instantly and sent hot lead towards the Yuma Kid and Hank. A bullet tore through the Kid's hat, another seared his forearm, but his blazing guns were in action. One of the Bronson men fell flat, with a groan. And, beside the Kid, legs widespread and a hard grin on his weather-beaten old face, lanky Hank Hall poured in more slugs from his two big forty-fives. The other man with Bronson crashed down. But old Hank also hit the ground with a groan and his guns whirled away into the hot sand. The Yuma Kid and Buck Bronson stood facing each other, not over fifty yards apart, and Bronson's gun rose swiftly. The Yuma Kid leaped behind a rock, holding his fire. The swift thought flashed through his mind that Buck Bronson must live. Otherwise, what proof? And then he heard Bronson's hammers click down on empty chambers! In one flashing leap he was at him, his own guns tossed aside.

In an instant they were a mass of flying arms and legs. In falling, Bronson's empty guns had been knocked from his hands. His great, hairy fingers clawed for the Yuma Kid's throat. Bronson topped the Kid by fifty pounds and several inches and both were hardened range riders. Fists drove against bleeding faces, against ribs. Legs, powerful as steel, wound about each other. From Bronson's lips came savage curses, then heavy breathing; and it was then that the Yuma Kid smiled a grim little smile.

Slowly but surely he was wearing the big man down. But Bronson was tricky. He realized he was losing. With one final wrench he freed himself and leaped back, dashed to his horse, flung himself into his saddle and went racing away at breakneck speed. In an instant he

had vanished around a cliff and, as the Yuma Kid stood on widespread feet, breathing heavily, wiping one arm across his bleeding face, came the fast receding clatter of the man's horse over the canyon's bottom; then, silence.

HE turned and looked down at the men lying about him. Hank Hall was clambering to his feet, blood smearing one cheek, but the old cowpuncher was grinning and rubbing his scalp.

"Doggone, Kid!" he grunted. "Most got me plumb center." He picked up his guns and started reloading. And he was grinning as he reached the Kid's side. "Now what'll we do? Beat it 'crost th' line or lug these hombres back tuh th' boss? Seems like they c'n put this thing on us, now—an' Buck Bronson's shore a good talker, with plenty dinero tuh back his habla."

"We'll take 'em back, Hank!" the Yuma Kid decided firmly, his eyes flashing. "Neither of 'em dead. We'll force 'em tuh talk." He walked over and gazed down at the sacks containing the gold ore. "An' these sacks is all branded with Bronson's brand, Hank. Reckon that'll be *some* proof, anyway. Let's git ridin'. We got *their* hosses, if they did turn ours loose, an' we didn't aim tuh kill."

The two men on the ground were groaning, but inspection showed that neither was badly hurt, though bloody. One of them looked up angrily, as the Kid jerked away their guns.

"Where's Bronson?" he demanded.

"He's vamoosed, fella," the Yuma Kid told him. "He started runnin' while th' runnin' was good. He's left you fellas tuh hold th' sack. Yo're robbin' Flyin' J property!"

The two men glared at him furiously. One of them scrambled up, holding his shoulder, where a slug had ripped the skin.

"Beat it, did he?" he shouted. "Then, by Gawd, we ain't gonna do time while he gits away. He brung us over yere, night after night, tellin' us he'd split three ways." He looked curiously at the Kid. "How'd yuh find that hole? We been coverin' it up good, every time, before leavin'."

The Kid only laughed softly. Then he made them march ahead, while he and Hank rode their horses, and they headed straight back for the Flying J. And on their way the two men were now eager to talk. Buck Bronson had been working the old mine for weeks; and he had planted cows in the canyon, had cut the border fence, driven cattle across—Flying J cattle; and venting brands and turning such cows loose on the range, near the canyon, where they would be sure to be found by Flying J riders as time passed; and he had led old Jake Cullen there, showing him a vented brand, and from a dead yearling, had cut off the piece of hide containing the changed brand; had told that story about seeing the Yuma Kid around there; and it had been he who had dropped the Yuma Kid's old hunting knife there, where Jake Cullen had found it.

"But why'd he pick on me, fella?" the Kid asked. "Just because o' that old quarrel him an' me had when I was ridin' on his Split M?"

"Naw!" grunted one of the men in disgust. "We seen yuh find the old mine and Bronson figgered yuh'd tell Cullen about it. That'd end our gittin' out any more gold. But ef Cullen swallered th' yarn, he'd fire yuh flat, an' then we'd go on as long as we liked."

Half way to the Flying J they stopped. A large group of horsemen was coming towards them at a gallop; and as they drew near the Yuma Kid saw Buck Bronson riding beside Jake Cullen, and, with them, was the sheriff and

a posse. The Kid stopped his little group and his eyes narrowed.

"Reckon here's where we do some tall explainin'," he said to Hank. "Good thing these two fellas wasn't killed, eh?"

WITH the sliding of shod hoofs over rocky ground the approaching group jerked to a halt ten yards in front of the Yuma Kid's party. Buck Bronson scowled savagely. He pointed a finger at the Yuma Kid.

"Caught 'im cold, Jake!" he shouted. "Him an' this yere side kick o' his'n war up in th' canyon again. Plenty sign up there, where cows' been drove acrost th' line—fence cut in two places; an' they been workin' a mine, up there, too. We caught 'em red-handed. Then they plugged us before we had a chance; got th' drop on us. Ain't that so, boys?" and he gazed down into the faces of the Yuma Kid's two prisoners.

"No, it ain't so, Bronson!" one of the prisoners roared, his face flushed angrily. "Yuh don't run away from us like yuh done an' then ask us tuh stand fer yore dirty work! Yo're . . . . yaller, damn yuh!" and then the two men, talking vehemently, told their whole story just as they had told it to the Kid.

With grim faces all listened. Then Jake Cullen looked into Buck Bronson's scowling face—and found that that face was ashen, the eyes shifting. He rode close to Bronson.

"What yuh got tuh say, Bronson?" he demanded.

Buck Bronson's rugged face flushed with anger. He jerked savagely at his horse's bit.

"It's all a dirty lie! It's a frame-up!" he roared.

Jake Cullen's eyes gleamed. Deep in his heart he had always half loved the Yuma Kid. He lifted his reins.

"We'll ride on down to that mine an' take a look," he decided. "Tom," and he turned to the grizzled old sheriff beside him, "I'm withdrawin' that request that yuh arrest Yuma—fer awhile. Let's ride!"

And, in a silent, stern-faced body, with Buck Bronson riding between the

sheriff and Cullen and the Yuma Kid leading the way, all rode back into the Canyon Diablo. And there, before the hole in the rocks, lay the sacks—every one bearing the brand of Buck Bronson's spread!

All went inside the cave, stood with staring eyes at the signs of the golden ore. All, that is, but Buck Bronson. He stood outside, glowering, fingering his gun-butt, and watching, with ferocious

expression, his two men who had confessed their part in robbing the Flying J of its gold. They were standing in the cave's entrance, ignoring him. Old Jake Cullen, inside, scratched his head and grinned as he looked at the Yuma Kid.

"Kid," he said, "I reckon we know now who's been ventin' Flyin' J brands —an' it ain't been you or Hank. I been wonderin', a durned long time, how come Buck Bronson was gittin' so much dinero tuh buy cows with. Reckon I'll jest have a little habla with 'im." His hand reached out and gripped the Yuma Kid's. "Boy, I'm shore an old fool!"

He strode outside and faced Buck Bronson, and his gray eyes were like steel points and his hand close to his gun-butt.

"Bronson," he began, his voice stern, "you an' me's reached th' partin' o' th' ways; an' this yere cow country ain't got room fer us both." Suddenly he half crouched and his right hand hovered above his forty-five holster. "Which of us . . . . leaves?"

BUCK BRONSON'S gun-hand flashed down, but before he could draw, the Yuma Kid leaped between them. Came a crashing double roar as their guns blazed. The Kid staggered back and blood spurted from his shoulder. But Buck Bronson's knees buckled and he flopped down in a heap, arms widespread, a final groan as he rolled over, face upward. A small red spot above his staring, glazed eyes, told the accuracy of the Yuma Kid's aim.

But the Kid was leaning weakly against Jake Cullen, and the blood from his wound was soaking his shirt over his left shoulder. He looked up at his boss and a grim little smile came over his face.

"Boss—Boss," he muttered dazedly, his gun now hanging from his limp right hand. "I reckon that . . . . snake's blood is cleaned, . . . at last." A wistful light came into his eyes. "Whatever my father may have done —"

Old Jake held him up with a strong arm and stared into his face in surprise.

"Yore father, Kid?" he exclaimed. "What yuh talkin' about, anyway, son? Somebody been handin' yuh that old yarn 'bout him bein' a—a outlaw? That war all a damned lie, spread by a lot o' varmints not fittin' tuh live. Yore father war one o' th' bravest secret service men this old cow country ever seen—an' I knowed 'im well. He war cleanin' out that old gang o' rustlers when that posse attacked th' bunch; an' when th' smoke cleared away yore dad lay dead. Everybody thought he war one of 'em. 'Course it looked thataway, Kid, but I knows th' truth. He war as game as hell!"

The Yuma Kid straightened, rubbed a hand over his eyes and breathed deeply.

"Thank Gawd, Boss!" he murmured. Then he toppled into an unconscious heap.

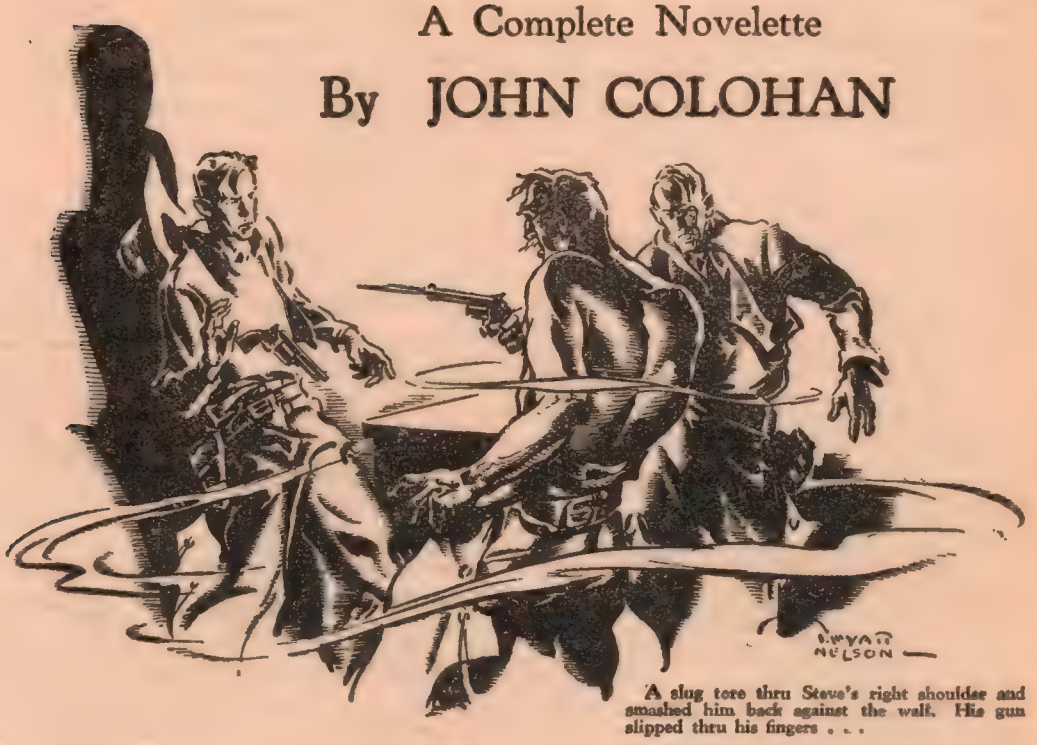
But old Jake knelt beside him, tore away the blood-soaked shirt and examined the wound carefully, with crude but intelligent range skill. Then he looked up and smiled at those about him, and started bandaging.

"Hit hard, fellas," he stated, "but too high fer permanent damage. Let's git 'im back home on th' Flyin' J an' we'll have 'im forkin' a saddle inside of a month—an' my pardner in this yere mine, too!"

The Law Round-up

A Complete Novelette

By JOHN COLOHAN



A slug tore thru Steve's right shoulder and smashed him back against the wall. His gun slipped thru his fingers . . .

AT first, when Steve Jordan had found himself on trial in Morgan county's musty courtroom, he had been inclined to smile at the charges brought against himself and "Whispering" Ben McArdle, his partner. But, slowly, as the trial progressed, the smile disappeared. A puzzled frown replaced it on the lean face of the youthful half-owner of the MJ brand.

In truth, Steve had grown increasingly puzzled with each day of the trial. He had been taught respect for law as he had been taught the letters of the alphabet. Now he was finding that law could be twisted and shaped to private ends, that it could be used as a cloak to cover the deeds of lawless men.

The case had split Morgan county wide open. Specifically, Steve Jordan and Ben McArdle were charged with stealing twenty odd head of cattle from Dave Hess of the Tumbling L. The evidence against the partners was complete and utterly damning. There was small question but that the jury would find them guilty. Yet friends of the two men swore bitterly that the whole affair was a frame-up, engineered by Mike Sloane —"Shotgun" Sloane—of the Pitchfork.

SHOTGUN Mike Sloane was the boss of Morgan county. He owned the Pitchfork spread, the largest cattle outfit in the county. He owned the Rocking Moon, the biggest saloon in Cottonwood, the county seat. Harsh, unscrupulous, overbearing, in ten years Mike Sloane had built up a machine which absolutely dominated affairs within the county. The sheriff was his man. The judge and the prosecuting attorney took their orders

from him. And Mike Sloane and Whispering Ben McArdle were bitter enemies

Particularly damaging to Steve and old Ben was the testimony of Dave Hess, the rat-faced owner of the Tumbling L. Hess seemed to testify unwillingly. Gleason, the prosecuting attorney, found it necessary to drag each statement from him. But, under questioning, the Tumbling L man testified that he had been missing cattle for some time, that finally, aroused by his losses, he had made an investigation. In a secluded box canyon on the MJ holdings, he declared, he had found a brush corral containing twenty three head of freshly rebranded cattle. While he had been examining the cattle, a man had ridden up. Hiding in the cedars along the hillside, he had watched the rider approach the corral.

"You recognized this man?" asked the prosecuting attorney.

"It was Ben McArdle," blurted Hess.

The cattle, driven to town, had been held in the railroad shipping pen for the inspection of the jury. They had obviously been rebranded; the brands had not yet healed. It was wet-blanket stuff, crudely done, with the original Tumbling L worked into a rough M, and a J added to the brand. As a final clinching fact one of the animals had been killed, and the hide introduced in court. On the reverse side of the hide the Tumbling L showed distinct from the burned over MJ brand.

And now the trial was almost over. The last bit of evidence had been offered up for the consideration of the jury. The last witness had left the stand. Gleason, the prosecuting attorney, had made his final appeal. Judge Henderson, grey as the belly of a fish and swollen like a toad, was clearing his throat when Whispering Ben McArdle got to his feet.

"Gentlemen," said Whispering Ben abruptly, "I'm guilty."

The judge jerked like a goaded steer. His flabby hand struck a water glass and sent it crashing to the floor. Through the crowded courtroom ran a low murmur of astonishment. Old Ben McArdle, erect and scornful, stood there waiting for the sound to die.

An old timer, Whispering Ben. A grim, grey moustached old timer with icy eyes and a frame warped and twisted by years spent in a saddle. In the days before Shotgun Mike Sloane had come in with his jackals, Ben McArdle had been sheriff of Morgan county. And he had fought Mike Sloane from the time the black-browed owner of the Pitchfork had first appeared in Cottonwood.

"Guilty!"

The exclamation came from Gleason. The prosecuting attorney had leaped to his feet. Sharp nosed as a coyote, he stared at the old rancher in stupefied surprise. For almost a week the two MJ men had fought the prosecuting attorney grimly. Now, with the end of the trial at hand, with the case ready to go to the jury, McArdle was admitting guilt!

And he wasn't guilty!

As well as any man within that room, Gleason, the prosecuting attorney, knew that Ben McArdle wasn't guilty. It was Gleason who had figured out the details of the frame-up by which McArdle and young Steve Jordan were to be railroaded to the pen. It was Gleason who had coached Dave Hess in the lies the Tumbling L man had told upon the stand.

For a brief, contemptuous instant the eyes of the old rancher rested on the face of the flustered lawman. Then he turned. His glance flicked over Judge Henderson where that individual sat like a bloated Buddha on his bench behind the walnut desk. His lips curled scornfully.

"I'm guilty," he said. "I stole the

cows. I changed the brands. And I'm ready to take my medicine."

In the chair beside his partner, young Steve Jordan's jaws clamped tight. His bronzed face lengthened in amazement, he looked at Ben McArdle as if he doubted the evidence of his ears. Gripping the arms of his chair he was about to leap to his feet in protest when McArdle dropped a hand upon his shoulder. Steve held his seat.

He held his seat, although he didn't understand. In old Ben's eyes had been a message that Steve Jordan couldn't read. But he had implicit faith in the judgment of his partner. Ready to back old Ben in any play he might choose to make, Steve sat back in his chair and waited for the next move in the game.

The saddle-warped old timer seemed all unaware of the sensation he had caused. He looked out over the courtroom where, for a week now, men had fought for seats. Cowpunchers in leather chaps mingled with sheepmen from below the Owl creek deadline. Sodbusters in overalls sat next to townspeople who had taken the day off to attend the trial. Along the walls standing men strained their ears to catch each word of what McArdle had to say.

But the eyes of Ben McArdle never went beyond the first row, where Mike Sloane's gunman crew sat in a line. Here were the men whose guns had made Mike Sloane the boss of Morgan county. Here, slouched over, thin face scowling, sat the Hunchback Kid, a withered shadow of a man as deadly as a shedding rattler. Here, stolid face expressionless, sat Bat Duplice, who held the post of personal bodyguard to Sloane. Here was Lacy, the Pitchfork foreman, who was a gunman and a killer, and who was said to have left Wyoming with a price upon his head. Others of Sloane's satellites filled out the row. In the center of the group, his eyes hard and unblinking, a fixed scowl on his face, sat Shotgun Mike Sloane, the boss of Morgan county.

Years before, in a brawl in the Rocking Moon, Mike Sloane had blown a man in two with a shotgun. Thus he had derived his name. He was a big-bodied, beetling-browed giant of a man who when drunk, liked to boast that he could whip any man within the county. There had never been any takers. But there was more to Mike Sloane than mere brute strength. Behind the fixed stare of the beady eyes was a cool, shrewd, resourceful brain.

Ten years before he had first appeared in Cottonwood, the County seat.. He had won the Rocking Moon saloon in a poker game. With profits from the Rocking moon he had bought the Pitchfork brand, and hiring a gunman crew, Mike Sloane had started on the career which was finally to make him the domineering force in the community.

In Morgan county it wasn't considered healthy to get in Mike Sloane's way. Things happened to men who interfered with him. Sometimes they died. Sometimes they disappeared between suns. Sometimes they found themselves in court, charged with a cooked-up crime. In Mike Sloane's court. The scheme was all-inclusive.

For years Whispering Ben McArdle had been a thorn in Sloane's side. Under the influence of the Sloane policies the county had gone rotten to the core. Still, inevitably, there had remained a sprinkling of honest men, of men who disapproved of Shotgun Sloane. It was Ben McArdle who had kept these men together, who had kept them fighting in the face of disheartening odds. McArdle and young Steve Jordan had taken no orders from Shotgun Sloane.

And now, with ten years of bitter enmity behind them, Ben McArdle and Mike Sloane faced each other across the

courtroom, and their eyes locked in a hard, uncompromising stare. On the face of the Pitchfork men appeared a triumphant sneer. Ben McArdle turned back, facing the jury.

"I stole the cows'" repeated Whispering Ben McArdle. "I want to say, here and now, that Steve Jordan never knew a thing about it. Steve's innocent. I did it by myself. And I'm ready to take my medicine."

That was all. Ben McArdle dropped back in his chair. He shot a hasty glance at Steve Jordan, and Steve saw that in his eyes was still that pleading, urgent message.

GLEASON was on his feet. The prosecutor had recovered his composure. His voice suave and oily as ever, Gleason was moving that the charge against Steve Jordan be dismissed before the case went to the jury. The judge, eyes protruding from puffy cheeks like the eyes of a stranded mackerel, nodded feebly in assent. Steve glanced at Mike Sloane. The Pitchfork man was beaming satisfaction. With a sinking heart Steve realized that Whispering Ben had played into Sloane's hands.

For it was Whispering Ben they wanted. Whispering Ben was the man who had been in the way of Mike Sloane and his gang. Steve himself had been too busy raising cows to be troubled with the politics of Morgan county. He had been included in the frame-up only because he was Whispering Ben's partner. Between Mike Sloane and himself there had been no love, but he had never trod on the toes of the Pitchfork man.

And now Judge Henderson was addressing the jury. Glancing occasionally at Sloane for confirmation, the judge was explaining the law as it was interpreted in Morgan county. Steve Jordan leaned forward.

"Yuh danged old half-wit," he whispered indignantly. "You sure played merry hell now."

A slow grin creased the leathery face of his partner.

"Son," said Whispering Ben indulgently, "you keep yore bazoo shut an' let yore uncle Benny handle this."

The jurymen marched out. Steve sat back in his chair. He was a free man now, the case against him having been dropped; but in the consideration of his partner's predicament he derived scant satisfaction from that fact. It seemed that Whispering Ben still had something up his sleeve. There was nothing that the younger man could do but await developments.

The afternoon was far advanced, and it was growing dark within the courtroom. An attendant lit the swinging oil lamps. From the spectator's section arose the subdued murmur of voices. The judge sat half asleep. And then the jury filed back into the room.

Poised on the edge of his chair, Steve Jordan listened while the foreman read off the verdict.

Whispering Ben McArdle was guilty!

It had been a foregone conclusion that the jury would find him guilty. Even without the confession, the evidence would have been sufficient to convict Ben McArdle. But still Steve couldn't understand why old Ben had made that amazing confession of guilt. His partner must have a hole card of some sort. Incredulous, half unbelieving, Steve heard Judge Henderson pronounce the sentence.

Ten years! Whispering Ben McArdle had been sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary!

It was over. Spectators crowded for the doors. His brain dazed, uncomprehending, Steve saw Sheriff Barton nudge McArdle to his feet. Steve lurched forward. Whispering Ben put an arm around his shoulder.

"Take a walk, son," said Whispering Ben. "Come around to the jail tonight. I want to talk to you."

Only then did Steve understand. He looked into the eyes of his old partner, and he knew then why Whispering Ben had chosen to confess to a crime which he had not committed. A lump came in Steve's throat.

"Yuh clabber-brained old idiot!" he exclaimed. "Why in hell—"

But old Ben turned away. Sheriff Barton was regarding the two men closely. It was common knowledge that the sheriff took his orders from Mike Sloane.

"Come around to the jail tonight," repeated McArdle.

But Steve didn't need to wait for night to understand why Whispering Ben had done the thing he did. He watched McArdle and the sheriff disappear through the side door which led to the jail. The courtroom was already empty. He walked out of the building and down the wooden steps into the gathering darkness of the street. And, as he walked, he was remembering something which had happened long ago —so long ago that never, until today, had it seemed anything more than just a fairy tale.

Originally, it had been his father and Ben McArdle who had founded the MJ brand. Cottonwood then, as now, had been a wild, wide-open town. One night, when his father and Ben McArdle had been in town together, Whispering Ben had found himself in an argument with a drunken tinhorn gambler. The gambler had drawn a gun. McArdle had knocked the gun from the fellow's hand, and turned away.

Many times Steve had heard old Ben tell the story. Whispering Ben had turned his back; there had come a cry of warning from Sam Jordan, standing at the bar; and Whispering Ben had whirled to find himself facing a hideout gun in the hands of the furious gambler. It was too late for him to draw, and for an instant Whispering Ben had merely stood there, looking down the muzzle of the gun. And then Sam Jordan had launched himself like a catamount from the bar, and knocked the killer aside just as the gun exploded. Whispering Ben went into action.

When the smoke cleared away the gambler was dead. Sam Jordan, struck by the tinhorn's first bullet, was dying on the floor.

It all belonged in the past; it had happened twenty years ago. But Whispering Ben McArdle had brought it up to date. Whispering Ben, realizing that Steve and himself had no chance to beat the trumped-up charge of cattle stealing in Shotgun Mike Sloane's court, had taken the guilt upon himself. It was his way of paying up an ancient debt.

Ten years! Ten years in the penitentiary!

Street lights gleamed faintly at the corners. Boot heels clicking on the wooden sidewalks. Steve Jordan walked slowly down the street. It seemed as though an icy hand, throttling thought, had closed down on his brain. Whispering Ben McArdle was the only father he remembered.

And now, framed by a jackal pack, old Ben was going to the pen!

He passed the Rocking Moon saloon. Mike Sloane's saloon. Lights shone out through the colored glass, and as he passed a burst of merriment came through the swinging doors.

They were laughing in there. Over whiskey glasses Mike Sloane and his crew were toasting their easy triumph. Celebrating because Whispering Ben McArdle was going to the pen.

Steve Jordan turned back. He kicked the swinging door open and stepped into the garish light. And not until the door

swung shut behind him did he remember that he had no gun.

CHAPTER II

THE Rocking Moon was Mike Sloane's Cottonwood headquarters. It was a place of bad repute, the hangout for that hard-bitten crew who took their orders from Mike Sloane. More than one man had kicked his last

on the sawdust covered floor of the Rocking Moon. But just now there was an air of gayety within the barroom. Mike Sloane, in jovial mood, was setting up the drinks.

Most of the spectators at the trial had come directly from the courtroom to the saloon, and as a result the place was well filled when Steve stepped through the door. The long bar was lined with men. Surrounded by a group of hanger-ons, Mike Sloane stood near the center of the room. He glanced up as Steve entered, and a momentary flash of surprise showed on his face. Then, holding a glass of whiskey, he stepped clear of the bar.

"You're just in time, Jordan," he called. "I'm settin' up the drinks."

Fire glowed in Steve's eyes. He had entered the barroom on impulse. Now, his lean, wide-shouldered body tense, his face grimly set, he stood there facing the boss of Morgan county. A mocking, contemptuous smile curved his lips. Sloane turned and brought a huge fist crashing down upon the bar.

"I'm buying the drinks," he roared. "Fill up a glass for Jordan."

Silence had come down upon the barroom. There was no other sound as the bartender slid a glass along the polished top of the bar. Steve pushed the glass aside.

"A man's got to draw the line somewhere, Sloane," he said deliberately. "Me, I won't drink with a polecat."

Mike Sloane put his glass of whiskey on the bar. Drunk, he was a blusterer; sober, he was quiet and cool and deadly. He was sober now, and his voice was almost purring.

"Did you come here lookin' for trouble?" he asked. "I was aimin ' to be friendly."

"Friendly!" rasped Steve. "Do you think I crave yore friendship, Sloane? You worked a rotten frame-up on Ben McArdle. I jest stopped by to tell yuh I figgered you was a low-down crook."

Fighting words, these, and this was Mike Sloane's stronghold. Steve Jordan didn't even have a gun; but rage had closed down upon him and made him oblivious to the danger of his position. Dimly he was aware of the fact that Bat Duplice had slipped clear of the group along the bar, that the gunman's hand was hovering above the black butt of his gun. But Steve had forgotten caution. His eyes fell upon Dave Hess, the Tumbling L man whose testimony had convicted Whispering Ben McArdle.

"That goes double for you, Hess," he

said. "The sheriff's got my gun. When I get it I'll be lookin' for you. This county ain't big enough to hold the pair of us."

Dave Hess was partly drunk. He was a small man, sharp featured as a rat, and normally he was not a man to take unnecessary chances. But now he was surrounded by Mike Sloane's gunmen, and this fact, coupled with the observation that Steve was unarmed, seemed to lend him a spurious courage. He bristled.

"Don't you crowd me none, Jordan," he warned. "Old Ben McArdle got jest what he had comin'. I ain't troublin' you, an' I don't aim to let you trouble me."

Something seemed to snap in Steve's brain. More than once, in the lean years when Dave Hess was getting his start, Whispering Ben McArdle had befriended the little man. In return, Dave Hess had sworn away McArdle's freedom with a pack of lies. Steve Jordan took a quick step forward. He grabbed Hess by the throat, jerked the Tumbling L man clear of the bar.

"You rat!" he snarled. "I oughta kill yuh with my hands."

The furious fingers closed down on the throat of the smaller man. In that vice-like grip Dave Hess seemed to shrink perceptibly. The drunken courage left his face and staring fear replaced it. And suddenly, despairingly, Dave Hess grasped for his gun. He found it, fetched it upward in a swift arc.

Steve saw the movement. His left hand dropped and closed about the barrel of the gun. He wrenched it from the grasp of the Tumbling L man.

He got it just in time. Bat Duplice was sliding forward. Mike Sloane's private killer was coming to the rescue of Dave Hess. Steve saw him coming, saw the upraised colt. He whirled Dave Hess around just as flame spurted from the muzzle of Duplice's gun.

The bullet missed. Duplice had been handicapped by the fact that Dave Hess was between him and his prospective victim. Steve felt the leaden slug pluck at his shirt as it passed. He spun the captured gun around and threw a shot at Duplice.

Miraculously, that hasty bullet found its mark. Bat Duplice stopped. Over his face came an expression of surprise. His gun slipped from his fingers. Bat Duplice, gunman and killer, pitched forward on the floor.

It was touch and go now. Guns were showing all along the bar. Steve threw an arm around Dave Hess and held the Tumbling L man as a shield between himself and the aroused pack of killers. Only his gun showed clear. It swung in a slow, menacing arc.

"Put up the hardware," he said, icy voiced. "Duplice asked for it. He got it. I'll kill the first man that moves."

None moved. Death was in the grim face of the puncher as he held them under his gun. They hugged the bar, staring. Only Mike Sloane stood clear. Mike Sloane's beady eyes glittered, and his face was a mask of fury.

"You can't get away with this, Jordan," he said, voice trembling. "You've over-played yore hand. I'll have yore hide inside of twenty four hours."

Steve Jordan did not answer. His gun covered them all impartially. Slowly, dragging the fear-stricken Hess, he retreated toward the door. Still Hess was a shield between him and Sloane's gang of killers. At the door he stopped. His eyes dropped to the face of the Tumbling L man.

"Say yore prayers!" he snarled.

His eyes were mere pin-points of light. He thumbed the hammer of the Colt back with a click. Dave Hess crumpled in his arms. Fear had taken the strength

from him, had made him a man of straw. Steve held him on his feet.

"Jordan—Jordan—" he pleaded. "Don't—I never—"

"Say yore prayers!"

A stricken silence had come down upon the room. Even Mike Sloane watched, fascinated, the drama that was being played out beneath his eyes. Slowly the black Colt lifted. A cry broke from the lips of the Tumbling L man.

"Jordan—I tell yuh—"

The black gun stopped.

"Don't ever let me see you again," said Steve Jordan.

He hurled the frightened man aside. For an instant, gun in hand, he stood poised in the doorway. His eyes found Shotgun Sloane.

"Turn yore wolf loose any time, Sloane," he rasped, and backed out through the swinging doors.

Once clear of the saloon he turned and walked swiftly down the street. Black rage was hammering at his brain, and he did not look back.

And so he didn't know that the doors of the Rocking Moon had opened to let out another man. He didn't know that Mike Sloane had taken him at his word, that the Hunchback Kid, the wizened shadow who was the deadliest of all Sloane's gunmen, was camping on his trail.

THOUGH Steve Jordan did not know that the Hunchback Kid was on his trail, he did know that Cottonwood had become for him a town of death. For Cottonwood was Mike Sloane's town. He had thrown down the gauntlet to Sloane and his crew, and he knew that the challenge would not go unaccepted. From now on, always, he would have Mike Sloane to consider in his plans.

Nor could he make any plans until he had an opportunity to talk with Whispering Ben. It was still early evening, and it was likely that the sheriff would be at supper now. Steve decided to stop at the eating house before making his call at the jail.

He was watchful as he moved down the shadowed darkness of the street. He had turned his gun over to Sheriff Barton at the time of his arrest, and the sheriff still had the weapon. But now Steve had the gun which he had taken from Dave Hess tucked within his waistband. As he passed Lane's general store he remembered that he had no shells for it other than those already in the cylinder. There was a light in the store, and he entered.

The store was empty of customers. Lane himself came forward to wait on Steve. Steve called for a box of forty-five shells. Lane regarded him curiously as he placed the shells on the counter.

"Gunning for someone, Steve?" he asked.

Lane, a small, worried looking man, was a friend of long standing. Steve sat on a corner of the counter and told the storeman of the episode in the Rocking Moon. When he had finished Lane shook his head.

"Yuh made a bad mistake, Steve," he said. "This is Mike Sloane's town. And Sloane's a damn bad customer to monkey with."

"What's wrong with this country?" demanded Steve bitterly. "There's plenty of honest men hereabouts. Howcome Mike Sloane's got everybody treed?"

"There's honest men here," admitted Lane. "An' there's plenty o' men would like to see the end o' Shotgun Sloane. But he's got too many killers on his payroll. There's nobody wants to take the chance o' going up agin him. It's bad luck. Look at Bill Severn."

"Severn?"

Lane glanced about anxiously.

"Yuh know," he explained, "Sloane an' Bill Severn had an argument about

whose range was which. But you'll notice that Sloane's cows are gettin' fat on the range that Bill Severn claimed."

"But Severn's dead."

"Sure," agreed Lane gloomily. "Severn's dead. The sheriff found his body in a dry wash an' fetched it into town. The coroner pronounced that Severn had died with a broken neck from bein' throwed off a horse. So Severn got buried, an' Mike Sloane got the range."

"I reckon there was no one to put up a fight after Severn got his neck broke, an' Sloane just naturally grabbed it."

Lane lowered his voice.

"I was talkin' to Rusty Gale. Rusty was Severn's foreman, yuh know. Rusty told me that he sorta prospected around out at the place where Severn was s'posed to have been thrown from his horse. Finally he found an old coat. It was all soaked in blood, and it had a little hole in the back. Like the hole a bullet makes. It was Bill Severn's coat."

"Yuh mean—"

"I mean," said Lane soberly, "that it's bad luck to fall out with Mike Sloane. You'll have to watch yore step.

Steve nodded somberly. "I aim to."

He left the store. As he walked down the street he reflected that it was men like Henry Lane who had made it possible for Sloane to build up his machine. Lane was honest; he was law-abiding; and doubtless he would have preferred to live in an honest town. But he was afraid to make a stand against the aggressive Sloane.

He entered the eating house. A few late diners were present and Steve nodded to those he knew as he took his place at the counter. He noticed that he was regarded with curious eyes; and he knew that already word of the trouble in the Rocking Moon had gone forth, and that he was a marked man in Cottonwood.

When he had finished his meal he continued on toward the courthouse. It was entirely dark. The jail, and the quarters of Sheriff Barton, were on the ground floor, and these, too, were dark. No light showed through the barred windows. Steve tried the door of the sheriff's office. It was locked.

Somewhere in this gloomy old building, Whispering Ben McArdle was sitting in a cell. The courthouse was on a dark and lonely street. For a moment Steve toyed with the idea of forcing the office door and attempting a one-man jail delivery, but, giving the thought up as foolish, he turned and started back for town. He would have to find the sheriff.

But the sheriff he did not find, although he made a complete round of the town. At last there remained only the Rocking Moon, the stronghold of Mike Sloane. He would have preferred to avoid a second trip to the saloon, but he was determined to locate Sheriff Barton.

And so, making sure that the gun in his waistband was conveniently close to his hand, once more Steve pushed through the swinging doors of the Rocking Moon. The bartender was idly polishing a glass. In the back part of the room a few men were playing cards. Otherwise the place was empty. The sheriff was not there, nor was Sloane.

More puzzled than ever Steve left the saloon. Not only had the sheriff disappeared, but also it seemed that Sloane had dropped from sight. Prowling aimlessly, he kept on down the street until he reached Miller's barn. Miller, feet perched on a battered desk, was in the office. Steve dropped in a chair.

"Seen Sheriff Barton?" he asked.

Miller nodded. "He was here a while ago. Him an' Mike Sloane. Sloane put his horse up an' said he aimed to stay all night."

Steve went out. He wandered down the street. The sheriff and Mike Sloane

were together. That would mean trouble for someone. Likely, Steve reflected, for himself.

He was crossing the street toward the hotel when he saw, ahead of him, a dumpy figure plowing purposely along the wooden sidewalk. Even from the back there was something familiar about the waddling figure. Then Steve recognized the man. It was Judge Henderson, who had sentenced Whispering Ben McArdle to ten years in the penitentiary. Judge Henderson, who was one of Mike Sloane's jackals.

And something in the actions of the jurist aroused Steve's suspicions. There was something furtive about the judge's manner as he moved down the street. At the corner of Meyer's saddle shop he drew up and glanced around suspiciously. He did not see Steve, for that young man was standing in the shadow of a building. For a moment the judge surveyed the almost empty street. Then he dodged around the corner.

Quickly Steve stepped out from the building and took up the judge's trail

And behind Steve, noiseless as a shadow, moved the Hunchback Kid. Sloane had delegated to him the task of keeping track of Steve Jordan. The Hunchback Kid was having an entertaining evening.

AND now the judge had disappeared. When Steve reached the corner of the saddle shop the judge was nowhere to be seen. Scuttling around the building he had vanished from sight with the abruptness of a prairie dog diving into a hole.

It troubled Steve Jordan. Mike Sloane and the sheriff were together, and they could not be located. The judge had vanished. Slowly Steve walked along the street which had swallowed up the judge. Dark, unlighted, lined with empty shacks it was a strange street for the judge to select for an evening's stroll. More than ever was Steve convinced that something was afoot.

The night was dark. No stars showed in the sky. He followed the street to its end, and was coming back when he saw a flash of light at the rear of the saddle shop. It was no more than the momentary flare of a match as someone lit a cigarette, but it gave Steve the lead he wanted.

The saddle shop was housed in a gaunt, two-storied building which had originally been intended for a hotel. That enterprise had been abandoned, and the lower part of the building had been converted into a saddle shop. In the rear was an outside stairway which led to the second floor. Here the match had flamed. And now Steve remembered that Gleason, the prosecuting attorney, had his quarters on the second floor of the building.

Now the disappearance of the judge was explained. The judge, of course, was paying a call on the prosecuting attorney. But Mike Sloane and the sheriff had also dropped from sight, and Steve wondered if they, also, were not in Gleason's quarters.

And then he made a discovery which persuaded him that his hunch was right. He had taken a post across the street from the stairway, and, shielded by the darkness, he was studying the ramshackle old building when a man came around the corner. He could not recognize the man, could only follow him by the sound of his footsteps on the wooden sidewalk. The fellow climbed the stairway which led to Gleason's rooms.

A voice spoke. In the still night the words carried plainly to Steve's ears.

"That you, Lacy?"

"It's me."

That was all. It was enough. Lacy was foreman of Sloane's Pitchfork outfit, and one of Sloane's right hand men.

Evidently Sloane and his men were holding a meeting in the second-story rooms of Lawyer Gleason—and a meeting of importance, since they had posted a guard at the stairway!

Steve whistled softly. "The buzzards are gathering," he mused. "Must be something rotten somewhere. I'd sure like to have an ear at the key-hole."

The idea appealed to him. By now he was sure that the sheriff and Sloane, as well as the judge, were within the building. And, after the events of today, there could never be anything but war between himself and Mike Sloane. Sloane was out for his scalp. If he could get an inkling of the big man's plans, it would help him in the dangerous game he was playing.

But the proposition was impractical. Before he could overhear their conversation he woud first have to get within the building. The only means of entry was by the stairway—and it was guarded!

He walked along the street, studying possibilities. To enter by way of the stairway was impossible, for, even if he could overcome the guard, he could not hope to do so without alarming those within the building. But it might be that on the roof of the building was a sky-light or an opening of some sort which would permit him to enter unobserved.

Adjoining the saddle shop on the west was Clint Newell's barber shop, a smaller building with a false front. It might be possible, he reflected, for a man to get on the larger building by way of the barber shop. It would be worth a trial.

By now he was definitely committed to the audacious project. If he should succeed in finding an opening on the roof he would probably need a rope of some sort to lower himself noiselessly into the building. With that thought in mind he crossed to the livery stable, where he found a coiled rope hanging on a wooden peg in the side of the building. Tucking the rope under his coat, he started up the street.

It was not late, but only a few people were abroad. He met no one as he traversed the short block between the livery stable and the barber shop. When he reached the barber shop he glanced cautiously around, and then dodged behind the building.

And, almost at once, Providence came to his aid. In the rear of the barber shop he stumbled over a ladder. Using the ladder, it was but the work of a moment for him to reach the roof of the barber shop, and then, pulling the ladder after him, he was soon on top of the larger building.

Here his good luck deserted him. Crawling on hands and knees so that no sound might carry to the ears of those beneath him, he thoroughly inspected the roof of the building. There was no sky-light; nor was there any opening which would furnish an entry to the building.

Ruefully he took stock of the situation. Having come so far, he hated to abandon the enterprise. It was a tar-paper roof, with a gentle slope toward the alley. Cautiously feeling his way in the pitch darkness, Steve crept along the roof. He reached the edge of the roof at last, and carefully he thrust his head out over the alley in an effort to locate the guard. He pulled it back with the celerity of a turtle retreating into its shell. The guard was almost directly beneath him!

The man was seated on the landing smoking a cigarette. It was the glow of the cigarette which had warned Steve of his presence. Hardly breathing, he crouched above the unsuspecting guard. The landing was perhaps eight feet below the edge of the roof. It would be no task for him to drop on the guard.

But, even with the advantage of surprise, could he subdue the man without the noise of the struggle being heard within the building?

It wasn't likely. And then, even as Steve debated ways and means by which he might get past the guard, the man stood up.

It was Opportunity. Steve did not hesitate. His gun was in his hand. He brought the barrel crashing down on the guard's head. The thought of Whispering Ben lent force to the blow. The guard crumpled without a sound.

Blessing the foresight which had provided him with a rope, the puncher dropped over the edge of the roof to the stair landing. With expert hands he trussed the guard. Knotting his bandana handkerchief, he slipped it between the jaws of the unconscious man for a gag. Then, shouldering his victim, he carried him down the stairs and deposited him in the shadow of the building.

Cautiously he climbed back up the stairs. At the landing the door was open. The hall was dark as a pit, but, far down the hallway, he could see a faintly penciled gleam of light. Soft footed as a cat he crept toward that tiny beacon. The hall was carpeted, but to Steve it seemed that each separate board in the ancient building groaned out a protest as he advanced.

The muffled sound of voices carried to his ears as, every sense alert, he slipped like a shadow along the wall. He knelt beside the door.

And a voice said: "If you're afraid of Steve Jordan you can forget it. That gent won't live long enough to bother anyone."

Shotgun Mike Sloane was speaking!

CHAPTER III

SEVERAL matters were responsible for the call which had gathered the company beneath the hospitable roof of Gleason, the attorney. Here, in the pleasant library of the prosecuting attorney, with its walls lined with pictures, with deep chairs scattered about, with an old fashioned oil lamp with a flowered shade throwing a mellow light over the scene, had been collected the men who were the cogs in Mike Sloane's ruthlessly efficient machine.

Here sat Judge Henderson with his pudgy hands folded over his ample stomach. Here, bulldog jaw outthrust, was Barton, the sheriff of the county. Dave Hess, the Tumbling L man whose testimony had been the decisive factor in the conviction of Whispering Ben McArdle, rested his arms on the table. Lacy, the Pitchfork foreman, and Mike Sloane sat in chairs near the table. Gleason, the man of law, completed the group.

Primarily they had met to consider the case of Steve Jordan. Steve, kicking over the traces and killing Bat Duplice, had become a problem. He was in Mike Sloane's way. Men who got in Sloane's way were removed.

There was another problem. Dave Hess had suffered a change of heart. That evening, in the Rocking Moon, Dave Hess had looked into the muzzle of a gun. He had felt the icy hand of Death on his shoulder. The experience had not been reassuring. Dave Hess had discovered a conscience.

Mike Sloane put it into words.

"Dave's turned yellow," he sneered. "Steve Jordan said he'd kill him the next time they met, and now Dave's got religion. He wants to clear out."

Under their concentrated gaze Dave Hess wriggled uneasily.

"It's not that, altogether, Sloane," he protested. "I'm sick o' the whole business. I want to get away. Old Ben McArdle was a friend o' mine. I'm ashamed to look a man in the face after what I done to him."

"You mean," said Sloane brutally, "you're afraid Steve Jordan will put a bullet in yore guts if you stay."

"Mebbe so," muttered Hess. "Jordan's right handy with a gun, an' I'm not. I don't know as I'd blame him after what I done to McArdle. I tell yuh, I want to get away."

And now Sloane looked at Hess.

"You're a rat, Hess," he said dispassionately. "A man points a gun at yuh, an' you put yore tail between yore legs. If you're afraid o' Steve Jordan, you can forget it. That gent won't live long enough to bother anyone."

Sheriff Barton leaned forward.

"How yuh aim to handle Jordan?"

Sloane's beady eyes glittered. "A bullet will take care o' him."

Barton shook his head. "There's been too much o' that already. If Steve Jordan is killed everybody will know you had it done. People are beginnin' to get curious hereabouts. They're askin' me why I don't do something."

"Jordan's got to go," declared Sloane. "He's on the war-path, an' we don't want no fuss kicked up right now. Besides," he added sardonically, "we got to get him before he gets Hess."

"Yuh needn't worry about me," said Hess. "I tell yuh, I'm gettin' plumb outa the country."

"What's holdin' yuh?"

"You know what's holdin' me," said Hess angrily. "You promised if I'd testify against Ben McArdle you'd tear up that mortgage yuh got on the Tumbling L. I jest want you to keep yore promise."

"If you're leaving," grinned Sloane, "what do you care what happens to the Tumbling L?"

"I got a chance to sell it if I can lift the mortgage."

Mike Sloan was enjoying himself. "Well, Dave, you stick around an' mebbe I'll tear up that mortgage. I don't say I will. But mebbe I will, if you ketch me when I'm good natured."

Dave Hess regarded him uneasily. "Sloane, yuh promised—"

But the voice of Gleason interposed. Gleason was not a gunman; he was a man of law; but all of these men within the room knew that the attorney was as coldly ruthless as was Mike Sloane himself.

"Has it occurred to you," asked Gleason, "that whether our friend Hess goes or stays, he has become a dangerous man?"

Sloane grinned. "Dangerous?"

Gleason's voice was as cold as ice.

"Hess knows enough to hang every man within this room. And it seems to me that in his present state of mind he is quite likely to tell what he knows."

They stared at the suave man of law.

They had been enjoying the baiting which Sloane had been giving the Tumbling L man. All of them held Dave Hess in contempt, knowing that Mike Sloane was using him as a pawn. But they had forgotten that the little man held a weapon over them all alike.

"Dave Hess knows who killed Bill Severn," said Gleason. "He knows about this McArdle business today. He is a dangerous man to have around."

"Get on with it, Gleason," growled Sloane. "You're comin' to something. What is it?"

"Just this," said lawyer Gleason. "Steve Jordan told Hess he'd kill him the next time they met. A number of people heard the threat. Now, if our friend Hess was found dead, it would be easy to convict Jordan of the murder. We could even arrange to have a witness or two."

Mike Sloane's jaw dropped.

"You mean for us to kill Hess, and then—"

"I mean," said Gleason, icy voiced, "that if Dave Hess were found dead it would simplify a problem for us all."

Mike Sloane brought his fist down on the table with a crash that shook the heavy lamp. "Gleason, I give it to you! That will take care o' Jordan. And it will handle Hess. It'll leave us in the clear."

Dave Hess struggled to his feet. Stark terror showed in his face. He knew these men. He had been part of the gang, and he knew they were not joking. While he had been useful they had tolerated him; now that they were afraid of him they would remove him from their path. It was the way Mike Sloane did business.

"Sloane," he pleaded, "yuh don't mean—"

Shotgun Sloane stood up.

"Set down!" he roared. "I've been afraid of you ever since you got mixed up in this. If Steve Jordan held that gun on yuh a minute longer tuhnight in the Rocking Moon, you'd have coughed up everything you knew. You're a rat, an' I got no use for rats!"

"I tell yuh, Sloane—"

"Set down!"

"Sloane—"

Mike Sloane lurched forward. He was a killer, and it showed now in his face. His beady eyes gleamed savagely. A gun was in his hand. Despairingly, Dave Hess grabbed for the weapon. Sloane jerked it clear.

But Sloane did not fire. He swung the heavy Colt in a swift arc and smashed Hess across the face. The Tumbling L man collapsed without a sound.

" 'Twouldn't do to shoot him here," said Sloane callously, holstering the gun. "We got to figger how to work it first."

AND, meanwhile, crouching in the hallway by the closed door, Steve Jordan heard all the details of that amazing conspiracy. And as he listened there came to him the conviction that Mike Sloane had been delivered into his hands.

Less than four hours ago Steve himself had threatened Dave Hess with death. Now, kneeling in that dark hallway, his right hand clutching a gun, he saw that he could not let Dave Hess be killed. Dave Hess had become the answer to a problem.

Hess had information which, in the words of lawyer Gleason, would hang every man within that room. Hess, if he would talk, could provide the evidence which would wipe out the sentence hanging over Whispering Ben McArdle. And Hess would talk! If he could rescue Hess from Mike Sloane and his gang, Steve did not doubt but that the little man would tell everything he knew.

Freeing Dave Hess, the man he had promised to kill, had become the problem. Offhand, it appeared to be one which might offer considerable difficulty. How many men were within the room he did not know. He could tick off the names of five men attending the meeting, but how many others might be there he had no way of telling. It was, however, likely that one or more of Sloane's gunmen were also present.

Briefly Steve considered. Smashing his way into the room and attempting to take Hess from his gang of killers would be an undertaking fraught with peril. Sloane and his men would not let Hess go now without a battle, and the odds would all be in their favor.

But, even as he hesitated, Steve knew that there could be no other way. For old Ben McArdle's sake he would have to make the attempt. Nor was there time to look for outside aid. Sloane and his men might spirit Hess away. They might kill the Tumbling L man. Steve would have to act at once—and alone.

Lifting himself erect he grasped the knob of the door. Inside the room the voice of Sloane raised to an angry bellow. Cautiously Steve tried the knob. The door might be locked!

But it wasn't. He felt it give beneath his hand. Gun ready, he gathered himself for a spring into the room.

And something sharp and hard bored into his back. A harsh voice spoke in his ear.

"Don't jump. I wanta talk to yuh."

The Hunchback Kid had caught up with his man.

CHAPTER IV

IT WAS Mike Sloane who opened the door. On the face of Sloane amazement faded before a leer of triumph as he recognized the man held under the gun of the Hunchback Kid.

"Jordan!" he cried.

Behind Steve the Hunchback Kid was explaining.

"This hombre gimme the slip. How he got here I don't know. I found Shorty Ellis tied up under the stairs."

"Tied up!"

"Like a yearlin' steer. So I jest sneaked up the stairs, and here this gent was listenin' at the door."

"Where's Shorty?"

"Still under the stairs, I reckon. I never disturbed him none."

Steve still had his gun in his hand. It was bearing directly on Sloane, and in that instant he could have killed the Pitchfork man. But the Hunchback Kid was holding a gun against his spine, and he knew that a shot from him would be the signal for the killer to pull trigger. The Hunchback Kid nudged him gently.

"Drop the gun," he ordered.

Steve dropped the gun. He had no choice, and so he let the gun slip from his fingers, and Sloane kicked it carelessly aside with his foot. It struck the corner of the table leg, spun around, and lay there on the carpet. Sloane jerked his own weapon and covered Steve.

"Go back and untie Shorty," he told the Hunchback Kid. "Stay there with him. We'll take care of Jordan." He motioned Steve with the gun. "Step in. You'll be able to hear better inside."

Cursing the carelessness which had permitted the gunman to slip up on him, Steve stepped into the room. He had started out to get evidence which might help to free old Whispering Ben McArdle. Now he had the evidence; but, looking in the hard eyes of Shotgun Sloane, he realized that it wasn't likely he'd live long enough to use it. Like Dave Hess, he knew too much. He had become a dangerous man.

Mike Sloane towered like a bear, a mocking smile on his lips.

"What a rip-roarin' cow-puncher you got to be!" he taunted. "Yuh got away with that sandy in the Rockin' Moon tonight, an' I reckon yuh figgered you could get away with this."

Steve smiled. "Why not?"

He was smiling; but all the time a dull and throbbing anger was pounding at his brain. There was no mirth in his eyes as he turned in slow inspection of the men within the room. These were the men who had done for Whispering Ben McArdle; they were the ones who had fixed it so that Whispering Ben would go to the pen. They were crooks, jackals, hiding behind the law they flouted. His lips curled.

"The court is in session, I see."

Judge Henderson lifted his heavy head and peered at him through drooping lids. On the face of Gleason, the attorney, was the expression of a poker player who has unexpectedly drawn a straight flush. Sheriff Barton, poised uneasily, watched Sloane. Lacy, the Pitchfork foreman, was grinning like a wolf. As Steve's glance shifted he saw Dave Hess lift his head groggily from the table.

The Tumbling L man, knocked out by Sloane's gun-barrel, had recovered. He sat up straight in his seat, and in the lamplight he looked like a man moving through a tangled dream. The barrel of the gun had torn a long gash in his forehead. His face was a bloody mess. Hands gripping the table edge, he stared at Sloane with horror-haunted eyes.

But Sloan did not look at him. Sloane, gun lifted menacingly, crowded in on Steve.

"Yuh heard us talking?" he demanded.

"I heard yuh talkin' about killing Hess and framing the play on me. It was just the sort of a frame-up I'd expect from a buzzard like you."

"You're smart," sneered Sloane. "Well, it's not the sort of a frame-up you're going to get. You'll never have to stand trial for killin' Hess."

"No?"

"No. I got a better way than that. When Hess is found dead, you'll be suspected, of course. The sheriff will start lookin' for yuh. But when he finds yuh, you'll be dead."

"Yeah?"

"You'll be dead," said Mike Sloane gloatingly. "The official report will be that you put up a fight, an' he had to kill you."

He raised his gun. But Gleason's voice lifted warningly. "Don't do any shooting here."

"Don't aim to," snarled Sloane. "We'll tie this hombre up and take him out to the ranch. We'll keep him there so we can be sure he'll be on hand when the sheriff comes for him. Somebody get a rope."

"There's no ropes here."

"Get the one that Shorty was tied with. An' hurry up."

It was Lacy who went for the rope. Steve listened to his receding footsteps as he moved down the carpeted hall. As he listened it came to him that, once a rope went about his wrists, his last chance would be gone. Yet there was nothing he could do to prevent it.

He was helpless. Mike Sloane, his brutal face leering and triumphant, had him covered with a forty-five; and he knew that Sloane would shoot him down without an instant's hesitation. Four other men were in the room, but they did not count. Mike Sloane, and the gun in Mike Sloane's hand, were the only things that counted.

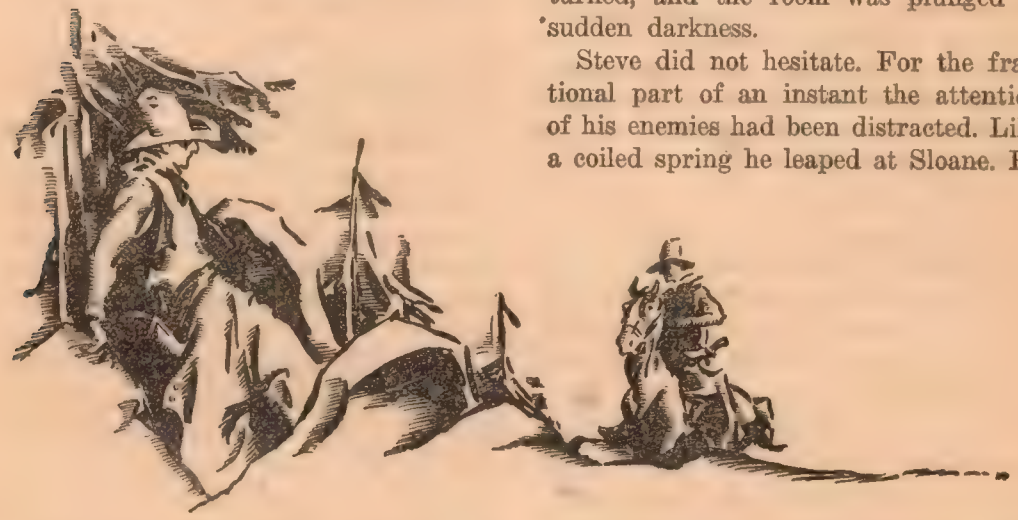
He glanced at Dave Hess. That little man was sitting bolt upright. Through the blood his face showed white with terror. His eyes, like the eyes of a cornered rat, were darting about the room.

It was Hess who recalled to Steve's mind the gun which he had brought into the room. The gun had belonged to Hess. Steve had dropped it on the floor, and Sloane had kicked it beneath the table. Steve could see it now, lying on the carpet beside the table leg. Ten feet away—

It might just as well have been ten miles!

And now Lacy was returning. Carrying the rope which Steve had used to bind the guard, he slipped into the room. He closed the door behind him. The gun in Sloane's hand lifted menacingly.

"Tie him up," he ordered.



In that moment Steve Jordan made up his mind that he would not be tied. He knew he had no chance. Sloane had him covered. The room was full of armed men, all enemies. The odds were hopelessly long. But it would be better to go out fighting than to be shot down while his hands were tied behind his back.

"Hold up them paws," growled Sloane.

Coolly Steve measured the distance between himself and Sloane. He gathered himself for the leap. He wondered if he would be able to knock the gun aside, to get one solid punch at Sloane's jaw. One solid punch—

There was an interruption. Dave Hess had been forgotten. In that second when all eyes were upon Steve, Dave Hess seized his opportunity. He leaped to his feet.

IT MAY be that the Tumbling L man meant to make a dash for the door. It may be that he had no conscious plan, that his frantic, blind leap was actuated by sheer terror. At any rate, unwittingly, Dave Hess did the one useful thing that he could do. He upset the table. The heavy oil lamp was overturned, and the room was plunged in sudden darkness.

Steve did not hesitate. For the fractional part of an instant the attention of his enemies had been distracted. Like a coiled spring he leaped at Sloane. He swung his fist at Sloane's jaw. The room was already dark when the blow landed, but the satisfying jar of it shook Steve to his toes. He heard Sloane fall. In the darkness he threw himself aside.

A gun blazed twice. Untouched Steve scuttled sidewise like a crab. He remembered the gun which he had dropped when he had entered the room. It was still on the floor beneath the table. If he could get that gun—

Mike Sloane roared out a curse.

"They've got no guns!" he bellowed. "Light a match, somebody. And block the door."

Desperately, in that velvet darkness, Steve fumbled for the gun. Somehow he missed it. His frantic fingers raked the carpet. Across the room somebody struck a match. The light flared up. And then Steve found the gun.

He whirled. It was the sheriff who had struck the match. Holding it high, the sheriff was advancing slowly. His bulldog jaw stuck out. The light gleamed on the barrel of the six-gun in his hand. From the floor Steve fired. The match went out.

It wasn't easy. It was hard to shoot the sheriff down as he advanced, serene in the assurance that the man he sought had no gun. But Steve Jordan knew he wasn't playing any game. This was life and death—life, while the room stayed dark; death, when the lights came on. In the darkness Mike Sloane bellowed like a bull.

"He's got a gun!"

Steve threw a slug in the direction of that startled, angry voice. Bullets laced the darkness. Steve had dropped to the floor and was working his way around the table. He drew up presently and listened with every sense alert.

Dark as some subterranean pit was the room. With the door closed, with the blinds tightly drawn, not a single gleam of light seemed to penetrate. Steve could hear cautious breathing, a subdued stir of movement. A grim smile curved his lips. It was a ticklish situation, but whatever advantage there might be in it belonged to him. He had no friends in here; the dark room was alive with men, but they were all his enemies. He could strike out blindly and not care who he hit.

From across the room he heard a soft click. At first he thought that it had been made by the hammer of a gun. Then he understood. Mike Sloane had crept around and locked the door. Mike Sloane, his single track mind still running grimly toward its first objective, was taking steps to see that neither Steve nor Dave Hess left the room.

It became for Steve no more than a game of waiting. This couldn't last forever. The shooting would be heard. Shooting in Cottonwood was not unusual, but shots in the quarters of the prosecuting attorney would draw a crowd. If Steve could live until the crowd got there, it would be well and good. If Dave Hess also lived it would be better yet. As long as the room remained dark they had a chance.

In the stillness he could hear the ticking of a clock. Somewhere a board creaked. Then, suddenly, the room rocked with gun-fire. A man cried out. Steve recognized the voice. It was the prosecuting attorney.

Another voice spoke: "God! Was that you, Gleason?"

But Gleason, who had cried out once, did not reply. A deeper silence seemed to settle on the room. Steve Jordan grinned. The law of averages was working out.

He sat still, huddled on the floor near the wall. His whole concern was given to keeping the room dark until help arrived. Movement was dangerous, as Gleason had discovered. The slightest sound might draw a bullet. The thought gave him an idea. He slipped off a boot, and, lifting himself to his knees, hurled it across the room. A groan rewarded him. But no guns spoke. His enemies were learning caution.

Seconds dragged endlessly. It could not last much longer. Mike Sloane would have to do something soon—and do it fast. If Steve or Dave Hess left that room alive, Mike Sloane would be forever through. And Sloane was smart enough to know it.

And now, outside the building, Steve could hear the sound of many feet pounding up the wooden stairway. Boots

clattered in the hall. Men were talking excitedly beyond the door. The doorknob rattled.

A voice called: "Hey! What's going on in there?"

But the door was locked, and from the room there came no answering sound. Death lurked in the darkness, waiting for that one fool-hardy enough to reveal his position by a sound.

The men outside consulted, loud voiced. Someone called: "Open up, or we'll break the door in."

But Steve was listening to something else. Cutting through the clamor from outside, there had come to his ears a sound which he could not classify. A muffled, gurgling sound such as water makes when it is poured from a jug.

Poised and alert, he listened. What that sound might portend he did not know. But he did not underestimate Mike Sloane. Somewhere in this room Sloane was crouching like a great cat in the dark. Mike Sloane, whose careful plans had been wrecked by an overturned lamp, whose house of cards would topple if those men outside broke the door and found Steve Jordan or Dave Hess alive within the room. Mike Sloane was still to be considered.

Outside a voice said distinctly: "There's something wrong in there. Let's smash the door."

AND THEN a match flamed up within the room. Steve jerked erect, gun lifting. Before he could fire, from across the room came something which looked like a flaming torch. It landed on a corner of the table and threw out a glare of light. Mike Sloane, hairy arms bare, a blazing six-gun in his hand, followed the torch. Mike Sloane, who knew that the game was almost up, was playing his last desperate trump.

Steve, crouching near the wall, had a slight advantage, in that he had seen them before they located him. Springing erect, he went into action. Lacy loomed up before him. He smashed two slugs at Lacy and the Wyoming killer dropped without having fired a shot.

He whirled on Sloane. Sloane's gun was already pouring flame. Aiming carefully, Steve fired. Sloane wavered, but came on, gun blazing. A slug tore through Steve's right shoulder and smashed him back against the wall. His gun slipped from his fingers. He slid to the floor.

Desperately, with his left hand, Steve fumbled for the gun which he had dropped. Sloane lurched toward him, gun raised. It was evident that the Pitchfork man was hard hit. But he came on still. In the fitful glare of the dying torch he loomed like a wounded grizzly. His eyes were gleaming and insane.

And then, into the flickering circle of light cast by the expiring torch, there came another man. A little man sharp featured as a rat, with a great bloody gash across his forehead.

It was Dave Hess! And he had a gun!

Sloane saw him then. Face twisting horribly, he spun around and fired at Hess. The bullet found its mark. But Dave Hess did not fall. Miraculously, he held his feet. The gun in his hand came up. Again Sloane pulled trigger, and, this time, the hammer fell on an empty shell. Dave Hess staggered forward. In that unreal light it was as strange as a scene out of a nightmare.

Dave Hess thrust out his gun.

"Out of bullets, Sloane?" he whispered. "Here. Take one of mine."

His gun was touching Sloane's breast when he pulled the trigger.

So it was little Dave Hess who put the leaden period at the end of Mike Sloan's unsavory career. But he did more than that. Shot through the lungs,

the little man fought death off until he had revealed the last detail of the frame-up by which Whispering Ben McArdle had been convicted and sentenced to the penitentiary.

Not that it mattered. Mike Sloane was gone, and with him passed the machine which he had built. Sheriff Barton, shot down by Steve, recovered. But Gleason, the man of law, was dead. So was Lacy, the Pitchfork foreman. Oddly enough, so was Judge Henderson.

It was strange about the judge. When the door of Gleason's library had been forced, they found the judge sprawled out across the floor. On the judge's body was no sign of bullet wound, no mark to show that he had been touched by lead. On his right cheek, beneath the eye, was a slight bruise. Steve Jordan's boot was lying beside the body. The judge, struck in the darkness by that flying boot, had died of fright!

Old Whispering Ben McArdle summed it up. A committee of his friends, scorning legal technicalities, released old Ben from jail that same night. He found his parner propped up in bed at the hotel.

"Law didn't mean much hereabouts," mused Whispering Ben. "We was getting our law dealt out from a stacked deck, with Mike Sloane runnin' up the cards. I sorta hoped, after I went to jail, that yuh'd stir around an' try to round up some of the crooks who was running things down at the courthouse."

Seated on a corner of Steve's bed, the old timer stroked his lean jaw ruminatively.

"But I never figgered yuh'd be so danged thorough," he concluded. "Near as I kin find out, the only one yuh missed was the janitor. An' I hear that he's left town."

THE END.

Famous Miner Had Wife Trouble

IN THE early days at Virginia City, Nevada, one of the leading characters about town was "Pancake" Comstock, the eccentric discoverer of the Comstock Lode. Shortly before he sold his mining interests, he welcomed to the western mining camp a Mormon named Carter, and his wife. Comstock's heart was touched at the sight of her sitting at the end of the canvas-covered wagon. One day she was noticed combing Comstock's hair and the next day both of them were missing. When they returned Comstock proudly displayed a marriage certificate, but the former husband would not be appeased until Comstock had made things square by paying him a horse, a revolver, and $60 in money for the woman.

Within a week after Comstock embarked on the matrimonial sea, he was obliged to go to San Francisco on business. While he was away, his Mormon wife promptly eloped with a seductive youth. Comstock rushed back, eager for the chase. The wife was brought back, and Comstock was busy assuring his friends that everything was all right. While he was giving them assurance, his wife bolted from a back window and went away with her young lover.

This time Comstock offered a reward of $100 for the capture and return of the runaways. They were captured and the reward duly paid, but early the next spring she ran away again, this time with a long-legged miner. Comstock's zeal for the chase had flagged by this time, and he contented himself with selling overalls, pick handles and bacon to the miners.

Hastings wiped blood from his shapeless nose and mouth with a tattered sleeve and stared down at Gibson.

"He was a man at that," he mumbled, and then collapsed from sheer exhaustion.

Feud Fever

By

C. B. YORKE

TED HASTINGS paused abruptly in the act of wiping an egg smear from his plate with a piece of bread, and stared hard at the screen door. For a moment he sat rigid, eyes slightly narrowed, every nerve of his young body tense.

Out of the darkness beyond the door had come a face that had been pressed close to the fine wire mesh of the screen. Momentarily the light from the interior of the little Chinese restaurant had illuminated the features. Then the man outside had turned and vanished in the darkness.

Hastings' first impulse was to follow the man into the night; but instead of leaving the restaurant immediately, he relaxed and finished cleaning off his plate. Then he twisted his chair around

and tilted back against the wall while he rolled a cigarette.

He had come to Piebald City with only one purpose in mind—to find Lon Gibson and avoid trouble, if possible. He was certain the face at the door had been that of the man he was seeking. Yet for the present he was content merely to know that Gibson was in town.

Probably, Hastings reflected, some old timer who remembered the past had recognized him when he had ridden down the single dusty street of the little cow-town at dusk. News of his arrival evidently had spread quickly, bringing Gibson to town to verify the report personally.

Still, only a fool would rush headlong from the restaurant. Such haste was not only unnecessary, but dangerous. Gibson was not a man who rode alone. He undoubtedly had brought one or two of his Walking J riders with him.

After finishing the cigarette Hastings drank the last of his coffee, got up, and moved toward the door. Behind him a stolid faced Chinese cleared away the dishes with quick, furtive movements. Even the Oriental seemed to sense that the presence of the tall young man in overalls meant trouble.

But Ted Hastings did not pause. With the brim of his soiled tan sombrero pulled low over alert brown eyes, the butts of a pair of .45's sagging well forward below his hips, he pushed open the screen door, stepped out on to the board sidewalk, and twisted quickly out of the path of light.

A rifle cracked somewhere in the darkness beyond the other side of the door. Hastings heard the hum of the bullet, felt the tug as it bit through the outer edge of the wide brim of his sombrero.

Jerking the gun from the right holster, he whipped around and flattened his back against the front of the restaurant. But no other shots came, and after the first momentary pause Hastings turned and bent low.

Two quick steps carried him to the corner of the restaurant. There he left the sidewalk and plunged into the darkness along the side wall.

Moving swiftly, almost silently, he reached the end of the wall and swung to the right. He went along the rear of the restaurant and passed two other buildings. At the far corner of the third building he paused and glanced toward the street.

The single shot evidently had not interrupted the usual night life of the little cow-town. The faint noises from the combination saloon and gambling hall, across the street from the restaurant, had not stopped.

Straightening, Hastings prepared to slip along between the buildings to the street. Then something bored into the middle of his back and a gruff voice spoke almost in his ear.

"Elevate, feller—and be quick about it!"

For the space of a single deep breath Hastings hesitated. There was a familiar note in the voice, vaguely so, yet stirring memories of a past that was almost forgotten. But the tone of the speaker had not been friendly.

Slowly, Hastings opened the fingers of his right hand. The gun thudded into the dirt at his feet. He raised both hands slightly above the level of his shoulders and kept them there while the man behind him lifted his other gun.

"All right, feller. Turn 'round and let's have a look at you."

Ted Hastings turned as directed. The face of the man who had come up behind him so silently was merely a blur in the darkness. Then the man thrust his face closer and broke into a low chuckle.

"Dang my hide, if it ain't Ted Hastings!"

Hastings grinned boyishly as he saw the features of the man plainer. "Sam Devlin!" he exclaimed, lowering his hands impulsively.

"Shore. Who you waitin' for so serious-like?"

"Some son took a shot at me out in front of the restaurant, and I slipped back down here to see what—"

"So that's what the shootin' was about," mused Devlin. "Well, me bein' marshal o' this town made me int'rested in that bit o' shootin' myself, but I didn't 'spect you was the cause o' it, Ted. Here."

Devlin returned the gun he had taken from Hastings and slipped his own weapon back into its holster.

"Pick up yore other gun," he directed, "an' let's move along out o' here. I heard you was in town, but I hadn't got 'round to lookin' you up. I got some things to say to you, young feller, an' you got to listen."

Hastings, puzzled by Devlin's sudden change of attitude, remained silent. He holstered both guns and then followed the marshal through the darkness at the rear of the buildings that lined the street.

Presently Devlin led the way around a frame building that was set slightly apart from those on either side of it. Hastings recognized the structure as the town jail house, and knew that Devlin also had meager living quarters there.

When they were seated in the room behind the small outer office Devlin gave the younger man a long searching look. Hastings' gaze did not waver under the close scrutiny.

"Been all o' ten year since I seen you last, Ted," Devlin said finally, nodding thoughtfully. "You shore changed a lot."

The younger man smiled. "You've changed some yoreself, Sam."

"Yep. I'm not as spry as I was. Ten years does things to a feller."

A feeling of pity came over Hastings. He saw that Devlin realized fully how he had changed, and in deference to the feelings of the older man he did not remark further on that point.

When he had last seen Sam Devlin

the present marshal had still been an oak of a man. Now he was little more than a shell of his former self, tall form shrunken, stoop-shouldered. The deeply lined face seemed a little sad, but Hastings saw that the blue eyes peering at him so searchingly were still clear, forceful, dynamic.

BESIDE the older man Hastings felt the full strength of his youth. Grinding work, long hours in the saddle, hardships that were taken as a matter of course in his wanderings, had not yet taken their toll of his vitality.

At twenty-two he was just beginning life. Devlin, well above sixty-five, was nearing the end of the long, long trail.

Something of that realization seemed to intrude upon the silence in the little room. For Devlin suddenly cleared his throat, wagged his head, and said.

"Yo're gettin' the wrong start in life, Ted."

Hastings looked mildly surprised, extended his legs, and crossed his ankles comfortably. The walnut butts of his guns gleamed dully in the mellow light of the oil lamp.

"Ain't none o' my business, o' course," Devlin went on, "but when I see a young feller like you stickin' his head into a pile o' trouble a-purpose, I want to set him straight on some things. I usually keep my mouth shut, but you bein' old Dan Hastings' boy I'm goin' to speak my piece an' hope you'll understand I don't mean no offense."

"I'm not a kid no more, Sam," Hastings said quietly.

Devlin shifted his gaze back and forth between the two guns for a moment. When he glanced up again there was a worried expression in his eyes.

"Nope," he admitted slowly, "yo're not a kid. The way you wear *those* speaks for itself, but that bit o' shootin' tonight is jist a sample o' what you can expect in Piebald City these days. You came back lookin' for trouble, Ted, an' you'll mebby find it 'fore you look very far."

Hastings frowned and pulled his feet close to his chair. "You ain't gone and sold out to Lon Gibson, have you, Sam?"

Shaking his head, Devlin explained, "I'm jist tryin' to be friendly, Ted."

"Well, yore word's good with me. I ain't aimin' to run contrary to law and order, you bein' marshal here, but I came back to pay off the debt I owe Lon and I ain't leavin' till it's paid."

Devlin sighed. His shoulders seemed to slump lower. The sadness of his face increased while he stared at the bony knuckles of his gnarled hands for a moment. When he looked up he said steadily:

"Times has changed, Ted."

"Human nature ain't."

"Yo're right," Devlin agreed morosely. "I see plain enough there ain't no use o' me tryin' to talk sense to you. I was jist sort o' hopin' I could reason with you a bit."

Hastings got out makings, offered them to Devlin. When they were refused he rolled a cigarette, lighted it, and blew smoke toward the ceiling.

"I see what you mean, Sam," he said, thoughtfully studying the glowing tip of the cigarette, "but I swore ten years ago I'd come back some day. I've come back now—and Lon knows what I've come for."

"Shore, he knows. But listen, Ted. Don't play yore hand so's I'll have to do my duty and lock you up. I wouldn't like much to have to do that to old Dan's boy."

"I give you my word, Sam, I didn't come lookin' for a gun fight."

Devlin stared moodily at a well worn boot toe.

"But I'm not sidesteppin' a fight if it comes my way," Hastings went on.

"I gather Lon's been actin' up high an' mighty like his dad did, and I'm here in Piebald City to put a stop to it. Lon's tried once already to get me, and I'm callin' for a showdown tonight."

"Lon don't shoot fellers in the back," objected Devlin, raising his eyes to Hastings' earnest features.

"Lon don't, mebby, but some o' those killers him and his dad always favored ain't so partic'lar. You know how dad and old man Gibson fought over water rights."

"That ain't no reason for you young uns to keep up a range feud more'n ten year old."

"Mebby not, to yore way o' thinkin', but you got to remember what happened to dad."

"I do, Ted."

"Then you ought to know it ain't so easy for me to forget. I was only a kid when they brought dad home that day with a hunk o' lead in his back that kept him to his bed till his dyin' day. Right near his spine, it was, and it paralyzed him so he never forked leather again. I can't forget that, Sam. That part hurts bad — way down deep." Hastings paused, then added softly, "It's hard to put in words."

"Shore," agreed Devlin. "I know how you feel an' I can't say I blame you much, but this ain't like the old times when—"

"Human nature bein' what it is, I can't do nothin' but pay off that debt, Sam. You know that as well as I do. I was only a kid when dad was shot, but I'd ha' settled that debt then and there if dad hadn't given orders to keep all guns out o' my reach."

"That's jist what I been tryin' to tell you," Devlin pointed out. "Yore dad didn't want you to carry on a feud that'd only mean killin's back an' forth without nobody profitin' by it."

"No, that wasn't it," Hastings explained. "You see, dad thought he'd get well quick. It wasn't till he found out two, three years later he'd never ride again that he told who'd shot him that day. It was Lon's dad, o' course. We all suspected it, but dad would never admit it until he knew he'd never be able to settle with Gibson himself."

"He thought all along he'd come back to Piebald City and buy back—"

"Yes," nodded Hastings. "He aimed to do just that, but he died a year ago without ever gettin' out o' bed again."

"I'd heard he died," Devlin said softly.

"He thought he'd be up and around right soon or he wouldn't ha' been so willin' to sell out to that easterner and go to Kansas City," Hastings continued. "Dad thought that K. C. hospital would fix him up and he could come back here and buy back the ranch and take up the fight with Mike Gibson where he left off."

Devlin wagged his head sadly. "It must ha' been right hard for yore dad to take when that easterner went and sold out to that K. C. syndicate which then bought the Walkin' J an' put old man Gibson in as foreman over the combined outfits after droppin' the DH brand."

HASTINGS smoked in silence for a moment while he looked sharply at Devlin. The marshal, however, was staring absently again at a boot toe and did not notice the look the younger man gave him. Satisfied that Devlin merely had been making conversation, living over the past, Hastings went on.

"That didn't set so well with dad, as you guessed, Sam. So I aimed right along to square things with the Gibsons when I got the chance. Then when old man Gibson died and Lon took over the job o' runnin' the ranch I figured I could settle with him just as well. Lon's like his dad was, in a lot o' ways. So I

rode in here tonight, and aim to do just that."

"An' them eastern doctors couldn't do nothin' for old Dan?" Devlin queried plaintively.

"Nothin'," Hastings replied in flat tones. "The hunk o' lead Gibson pumped into him stayed put. Dad's gone now, so I'm takin' up where he left off."

"Mebby I don't blame you, Ted."

"That's nice o' you to say that, Sam, but it don't alter the fact yo're marshal o' this town and sworn to do yore duty, if, and when trouble busts out. Lon's in town—and I can't ride out without seein' him. You know what people'd think if I did that sort o' thing."

"I might put you an' Lon behind the bars and let yore heads cool off a bit," remarked Devlin.

Hastings tossed the butt of his cigarette through an open window, lifted the sombrero from the floor beside his chair, and stood up. Devlin frowned while Hastings adjusted the brim over his eyes.

"Yo're not puttin' me in jail," Hastings said slowly, hooking thumbs over the cartridge belts that crossed below the waistline of his overalls. "Leastways, not till I start trouble."

"Reckon not," admitted Devlin as he got up from his chair. "Don't see how I can 'rest a man jist because he's got himself a fever."

"Fever?"

"Feud fever, Ted. I've saw it off'n on all my life. A feller never gets over it till gun smoke drifts past his eyes. Sometimes he sees the gun smoke, sometimes he don't."

"Well," Hastings conceded reluctantly, "mebby I do have a touch o' fever." He looked past the stopped figure of the marshal and added softly, "But I'm thinkin' Lon Gibson's worse off'n I am."

"S'pose you drift back to the hotel and wait till morinin'," suggested Devlin, desperately hoping to avert the encounter between the two young men.

"I'm driftin' down to the saloon," said Hastings. "Lon ought to be pretty well liquored up by now."

"Liquor makes him nasty, Ted," warned Devlin.

Hastings smiled a little, a tight smile that made his lips seem thinner and straighter. He brought his eyes back to Devlin as he said:

"I'm nasty when I'm sober. S'long."

The marshal put out a hand, thought better of it, and let his arm drop to his side. He stepped back and watched the younger man leave the room without glancing his way again.

Devlin waited until he heard the outer door slam. Then he said very softly:

"I've got to do my sworn duty. Shore, but can I help it if I think there's duty to be done at t'other end o' town?"

LAUGHTER and talk ceased abruptly as Ted Hastings pushed through the swinging doors of the saloon and paused just over the threshold.

There were probably two dozen men lined up along the bar or seated about the gambling tables. Most of them lived in town. The others had come to town especially that night to witness the almost inevitable clash between the sons of men who had fought bitterly years before.

For a moment Hastings remained in the doorway, perfectly poised despite the acute tension his sudden appearance created. Every eye was centered upon him while he looked over the crowd, picking out the stocky form of Lon Gibson about half along the bar.

Contrary to his expectations, however, Gibson had not been drinking heavily. His rather full face was flushed as he met Hastings' gaze; but

it was a flush of excitement, of inner turmoil, rather than the effects of liquor.

Two men on either side of Gibson were obviously on friendly terms with the young foreman of the Walking J. The others at the bar remained slightly aloof from the trio.

Hastings glanced at the two men with Gibson. Lean, hard bitten features, frankly hostile eyes, warned him that neither of them wore their guns as mere ornaments.

No voice spoke, not a man moved during the long moment that Hastings remained in front of the door. Then he stepped to one side and paused a few feet from the wall. From that position every man in the big room was in front of him.

"Just makin' a business call," he announced in a low, clear voice that carried to the far corners of the room. "Nothin' serious—I hope."

Silence followed his words for a moment. Then a drunken voice at the far end of the bar sang out:

"Whoope-e-e! The two-gun kid hisself!"

Hastings watched the man at Gibson's right move down the bar a few paces. The man reached out and gave the drunk a backhanded blow across the mouth. The drunk staggered away from the bar, lost his balance, and sprawled flat on his back on the floor. Hastings saw that the drunk was feeble, aged, white-bearded.

"The feller what did that is a—"

Hastings broke off as the man who had rejoined Gibson stepped out from the bar and paused with his hands poised less than an inch above the butts of a pair of guns. The men seated at several tables behind the crouching man scattered quickly.

Beady black eyes glared at Hastings. "Is a what?" prompted the man.

Before Hastings could reply Lon Gibson moved forward and plucked at the man's arm.

"Stay out o' this," said Gibson.

"No squint-eyed coyote is callin' Slim Norbuck names!"

"He ain't called you nothin' yet," argued Gibson.

"I don't like this *hombre's* looks," rasped Norbuck, keeping his eyes on Hastings. "He don't wear his pants right. And I ain't missin' this time!"

Gibson shrugged and stepped back into the crowd at the bar.

"Go on, *hombre,*" Norbuck urged. "I slapped the old codger, so speak yore piece or—"

"You said somethin' a minute ago mebby you didn't mean to say," broke in Hastings. "Somethin' about not miss-

ing me this time. What do you mean by that?''

Norbuck's eyes flickered momentarily Then they resumed their viperish stare, hard, cold, piercing.

''You know what I mean!''

''Shore,'' returned Hastings, ''but I want everybody here to know.''

''Ain't none o' their business.''

''Might be, sometime,'' Hastings returned coolly. Then, raising his voice slightly, he added, ''I'm tellin' you all —Slim Norbuck ain't man enough to deny it—that by those words this skunk meant he took—''

The words ended in a crash of guns that drowned out the sound of Hastings' voice.

Through a pall of powder smoke he saw Slim Norbuck jerk erect. Norbuck's guns slipped from stiff fingers. He tottered unsteadily. Then his knees buckled and he turned to fall on his face beside the sleeping form of the drunk.

In the silence that followed the roar of the guns the voice of Hastings droned on, hollowly:

''I was sayin', by those words Norbuck meant he took a shot at me earlier tonight—and missed.'' He paused, and after a moment asked in sharper tones, ''That's correct, ain't it, Lon?''

Lon Gibson swallowed hard. The flush passed from his face, leaving the tanned skin a sickly yellow. He breathed jerkily through his half open mouth, and the rushing air made little gurgling noises as it stirred the spittle in his throat.

''That's correct, ain't it, Lon?''

Nodding slowly, Gibson swallowed again. His eyes were wide as he stared at the steady guns in Hasting's hands. Not a man offered to come to his aid.

''I thought it was,'' continued Hastings. Mebby you put Norbuck up to takin' a shot at me. Mebby you didn't. A minute ago you all saw Norbuck go for his guns first, so that's all right.''

Pausing, he inclined his head toward Norbuck's body. He wanted to be certain the crowd understood the reason for the shooting they had witnessed.

WHEN several men nodded slightly Hastings moved his feet and kicked aside the holster that had been clipped from his belt by one of Norbuck's bullets. The other bullet had gone wild into the wall behind him.

''I guess mebby most o' you know why I'm here,'' Hastings spoke up, keeping his eyes on Gibson. ''There ain't goin' to be no more gun play, if you folks take this in the right spirit. Norbuck asked for it and he got it. Anybody else who wants it will get it also. I aim always to oblige.''

There were no replies to that statement. Lon Gibson remained apart from the men at the bar, seemingly fascinated by the sight of the guns in Hastings' hands. In the moment of silence the snores of the sleeping drunk sounded very loud.

''Easy-like, Lon!'' Hastings' voice was brittle now. ''Let yore gunbelt slip down around yore ankles—and step out o' it. Now!''

Like a man in a daze, Lon Gibson loosened his belt buckle. The weight of the cartridges and the holstered gun bore the belt to the floor. Gibson stepped out of the circle of leather and stood quivering with rage.

''You goin' to shoot me down empty handed?'' he husked.

Hastings moved his head slowly from side to side. ''Shootin's too good for yore kind, Lon. A man don't remember much when he's dead. You've been actin' pretty high'n mighty since you followed yore dad at the Walkin' J, and I want you to remember tonight. I'm just waitin' for—''

Hastings broke off as the swinging

doors of the saloon opened inward, disclosing the stern features and hurrying form of Sam Devlin. At the sight of Hastings with both guns out he paused abruptly.

"What's goin'—" Devlin stopped short as he noticed the bodies of Norbuck and the drunk.

"The old un's just drunk," Hastings explained quietly. "I was just sayin' I was waitin' for you, Sam. Everybody saw Norbuck go for his guns first, so mebby I can finish my business before you—"

"Good riddance o' bad rubbish," grunted Devlin.

"Arrest that man, marshal!" ordered Gibson.

"You keep quiet, Lon!" snapped Hastings. "Sam Devlin is here in the course o' his sworn duty to enforce law and order, and it's up to him to do it. But there ain't no laws on the books against fist fightin', is there, Sam?"

"Nope, reckon not. But—"

"Me and Lon's goin' to caress each other gentle-like for the edification of all those who wish to stay and any others who might drop in," explained Hastings. "I'm dependin' on you, Sam, and any o' the better element o' this town which may be present to keep stray hunks o' lead out o' my back. Ready, Lon?"

Hastings' warning was unnecessary. Lon was ready, eager now that he realized he had a chance against the tall cowboy who had disarmed him.

Quickly the drunk and Norbuck's body were removed to the far end of the bar. A wide circle of floor space was cleared of tables and chairs. The crowd formed around the outer edge of the floor, an undertone of remarks filling the room with sound.

Hastings turned over his guns, cartridge belts, sombrero, and vest to the bartender and was elated to see that the crowd was pleased with this new turn of events. Gibson, too, shed vest and Stetson.

It was understood as they passed through the ring of men and faced each other in the center of the floor, pausing a moment a few feet apart, that no holds were barred, no quarter was to be asked or given.

Then Gibson lowered his head and charged, depending on his superior weight to quickly finish off the tall, lean man who faced him. Hastings met the charge with a right below the ear and a crashing left between the eyes that lifted Gibson's head and shoulders erect.

Again Gibson tried to get in close and use the full power of his long arms and heavy shoulders. Hastings retreated steadily before the bull-like rushes, driving hard, clean blows to Gibson's head and body.

Abruptly Gibson changed tactics and stood for a moment, slugging toe to toe. Mallet-like fists plowed through Hastings' guard, hammering against his body, cutting and smashing his face. Then as Hastings slowly gave way again he opened a cut above Gibson's left eye and received a broken nose in return.

Back and forth across the circle of floor they weaved, Gibson trying hard for a knockout, Hastings contenting himself with stinging punishing blows that he knew in time would wear down the heavier man. At the end of ten minutes both men were still on their feet, blowing hard, but still swinging bloody fists.

A little later Hastings slipped as he missed a crushing overhand right. Gibson saw his chance, and dived under the other's guard.

Hastings grunted as he took a shoulder in his stomach and went down. The back of his head slammed against the floor. Spots of light danced and flashed before his eyes.

Dimly he struggled to twist free, felt the ache of blows that seemed to crush his ribs. His cut and swollen fists beat feebly against the leering face that hovered over him. Fingers crawled up the side of his throat, shut air from his laboring lungs.

Then as Gibson straightened to throw his remaining strength into his clutching fingers, Hastings twisted and kicked out desperately. A leg came free as Gibson's fingers eased the pressure on his throat for a moment.

Bringing up his leg, Hastings drove the heel of his boot deep into Gibson's stomach. Gibson grunted and suddenly looked naively surprised as he was lifted almost to his feet, sent staggering backward to sprawl at the edge of the circle of spectators.

Scrambling weakly to his feet, Hastings tottered toward Gibson and met him with a driving left uppercut to the point of his chin. Gibson tottered, then got his feet under him again. Hastings hooked a right under his left eye, took another jolt in the ribs, and battered a left and right to the jaw.

Gibson fell back into the crowd and hit the floor as the watching men gave way before him. He lay kicking his legs weakly for a moment. Then he was still.

Hastings wiped blood from his shapeless nose and mouth with a tattered shirt sleeve and stared down at Gibson through swollen eyes.

"He *was* a man at that!" he mumbled, and then collapsed from sheer exhaustion.

WHEN Ted Hastings again opened his eyes he was lying on the top of a faro layout, surrounded by a smiling group of men. Slowly he sat up and looked around.

"Where's Lon?" he asked, the words scarcely understandable as puffed lips refused to work properly.

"He had an important engagement," replied one of the men.

Somebody snickered, and the smiles widened. Sam Devlin pushed his way to Hastings' side and said:

"Seems like Lon was sort o' in a hurry, Ted. He came to a bit before you did an' didn't want to talk to nobody."

"He went back to the ranch?"

"Mebby."

"Well, I'll stay in town tonight, anyway," Hastings went on. "Tomorrow'll be soon enough to break the bad news to him." He took a folded letter from the breast pocket of his torn shirt and handed it to Devlin. "Read it, Sam. Out loud. Mebby the rest o' the crowd'll be interested."

Devlin unfolded the letter, read a few lines to himself, and then exclaimed:

"Dang my hide, if old Dan Hastings' boy ain't been 'pointed foreman o' the Walkin' J! Lon Gibson's fired — Ted takes over his job pronto! Seems like that K. C. synd'cate figured Lon's hifalutin' ways was bad for business!"

"Yeah," nodded Hastings in reply to the remarks and questions of the crowd. "That's the main reason I came back to Piebald City. But I didn't aim to tell Lon I was gettin his job till I got what Sam calls feud fever out o' my system. It's out now, so I guess mebby you folks won't mind if I go back to the hotel now and get some sleep."

THE END.

The Law AND The Profits

BY

ARCHIE JOSCELYN

THE LONG, curving mustaches of Tilbury Jones uptilted at almost a startling angle. He peered again, from the joint window of his establishment, over which was engraved the dual sign of "Judge Tilbury Jones, Justice of the Peace," and "Saloon, Tilbury Jones, Proprietor." No, there could be no mistake. On the opposite side of the street a new sign had just been tacked up, and this sign conveyed to the world the information that here might be found Morton Keator Hemenway, *Attorney at Law.*

Here, almost instinctively, Judge Tilbury Jones sensed trouble. No lawyer had ever invaded Bottlerib before, and the community had been able to struggle along quite nicely without them. If Morton Keator Hemenway had first called upon the Judge, as common courtesy would have dictated, and made known his purpose before hanging up his sign, it would have been different. His failure to do so, his total ignoring of Bottlerib's leading citizen, was ominous in itself.

"Oh, well," commented Tilbury Jones, philosophically, to himself. "We probably won't be strangers long." He moved behind the bar, helped himself liberally from a bottle plentifully covered with gold foil, and viewed the world through kindlier eyes.

ABRUPTLY, his thoughts were distracted from this new innovation by the appearance on the nearer horizon of a dozen horsemen, who, riding directly to Tilbury Jones' establishment, dismounted, resolving themselves into a posse, led by Marshal Jack Cameron, and four prisoners, the fruits of some twenty-four hours of strenuous effort, as the Marshal explained. The four had been engaged in their apparent profession of brand blotching, or overlaying old brands on cattle not their own, with their own brand. They had been caught red-handed in the act, and, judging by their skill, were professional rustlers.

Added to that offense, which was serious enough in itself, they had put up a stout resistance. More from luck than anything else, none of the posse were seriously wounded, though Surcingle Alton had a broken arm. With this much evidence, it would be a simple matter, an open-and-shut case in the court of Tilbury Jones. Justice was a simple matter here, handled with due decorum and expedition, and Tilbury Jones at once prepared to hold court.

"We'll all indulge in a few preliminary rounds of good cheer," he suggested, "to sort of liquidate our reasonin' faculties. Then we will proceed with the business in hand."

The Marshal, the prisoners and various others of the posse having purchased and disposed of rounds of drinks, Tilbury Jones moved behind his desk and called the court to order.

"Of course, I don't suppose there's much use in it, seein' how the facts are, but it'll make it simpler to hear the truth admitted, so we'll ask the prisoners whether they're guilty, or not guilty, and what they've got to say for themselves, if anything," he pronounced. He glanced at the first prisoner, a burly, red-faced ruffian who seemed a particularly fit candidate for the hangman's noose, and invited him to proceed.

"Aw, hell, Judge," said that worthy. "What's the use uh sayin' anything? We was caught brandin' steers that didn't belong to us, and I reckon they ain't any use in sayin' anything."

"You admit being guilty, then?" the Judge inquired.

But before the prisoner could answer this, the door of the saloon slammed open and a rather startling stranger burst in. He was a man of somewhat less than medium size, dressed as he apparently fancied a citizen of the West should dress, though this very apparel of his caused startled glances on the part of everyone in Tilbury Jones' Emporium of justice and good-fellowship. But it was the imperious manner of the newcomer, who had heard proceedings through an open window, as he hurried now to a place before the Judge, that attracted most attention.

"Your Honor," he intoned, but in a voice that seemed rather lacking in respect. "I should like to demand, in behalf of my clients, by what right this unjust procedure is being indulged in? You are of course aware, your honor, that it is unlawful to so question a defendant as to cause him unwittingly to commit himself. Moreover I have had no opportunity as yet to consult with my clients, or to agree to a time for trial. I must caution my clients, the defendants, to give no answers whatsoever until they have consulted with me, and I must protest against the whole unseemly manner of this court procedure."

Everyone, with the exception of the Judge, gaped in amazement at this flow of words. Tilbury Jones, realizing that trouble had breezed thus into his court, and sensing an opponent worthy of his steel, relaxed and allowed a genial smile to pervade his face for a moment.

"I presume," he said softly, "that you are Morton Keator Hemenway, attorney at law, suh?"

"That is my name and profession," Hemenway admitted. "And again I must protest against the irregularity of this whole proceeding."

"It is certainly irregular, suh," Tilbury Jones conceded, and Morton Keator Hemenway, listening to the soft slur of the words, glanced more keenly at the speaker. He suddenly perceived, much to his surprise, that he was dealing with a gentleman and a scholar of the old school.

"Very irregular," the Judge proceeded, "considering the fact, suh, that you have failed to present any credentials which would entitle you to practice befo' the bar of this court."

The Marshal smiled behind his mustache. Leave it to Judge Tilbury Jones to deal with a situation. But, while surprised, Hemenway was in no wise abashed or disconcerted.

"Perhaps it is irregular, your honor," he conceded. "But no more so, I dare say, than the whole proceeding. I notice from the sign over the doorway that you are justice of the peace. These defendants, as I understand, are charged with crimes which are, unquestionably, beyond the jurisdiction of any mere justice of the peace to deal with. Moreover, such a trial as this—"

"This," said Tilbury Jones, softly, "is merely a preliminary hearing, suh."

For a moment only, Hemenway was deflated by this answer. But the moment was very brief.

"I see," he agreed. "A mere preliminary hearing is, perhaps within your jurisdiction. I am willing to overlook other irregularities if you are willing to permit me to consult with my clients before the hearing proceeds further."

"Very well, suh," Tilbury Jones agreed graciously. "The court will be in recess for a few rounds of refreshments, while you may consult with the prisoners."

Hemenway looked around disdainfully.

"I can't very well talk to them with everybody here," he protested. "I must have an opportunity to consult with them in private."

"Marshal, just herd them in the back room there, and kind of ride herd on them while Mister Hemenway talks to 'em," the Judge instructed.

But again Hemenway protested.

"I wish to be alone with them, in strict privacy," he declared. "With no

officer of any sort present."

"Well, suh, your request will not be granted," Tilbury Jones informed him, and his teeth clicked. "Those cattle thieves are dangerous men, and they'd think nothin' of knocking you in the head and making a run for it."

Hemenway opened his mouth as though to voice a fresh protest, thought better of it, and retired to the back room in due course. The posse and such others as happened to be in the room indulged in a few rounds of refreshment, and wondered as to the outcome of all this. The Judge, also was wondering. He scented trouble ahead. The simplest and by far the best way of dealing with the situation, he reflected, would have been to instruct the Marshal to hang the lawyer up along with the cattle rustlers, and let it go at that. No one, with the probable exception of Hemenway himself, would have demurred or considered this as out of place. It would have settled the question, once for all.

But Tilbury Jones could not bring himself to act thus arbitrarily. He was, and prided himself on the fact, a gentleman, and he acted according to a gentleman's code. It would be taking an unfair advantage of the other man, and presuming on his own position, to deal thus with Hemenway. Meanwhile, he had to proceed still according to a gentleman's code.

FOR HALF an hour the recess continued. Then the Judge called a halt. A few more rounds of liquid refreshment would result in some of the posse becoming drunk, and he wanted none of that just now. The Marshal reported in an aside to the Judge.

"He made each of them dig up ten dollars as a retainin' fee," he said. "Told them that if he got them off, it'd be a lot more. They agreed to that. Most of them seemed to have a lot of money in their pockets. We only took their guns and their knives when we searched them."

"Ten dollars each, eh?" The shadow of a smile flitted over the face of Tilbury Jones. "Court is in session," he announced briefly.

Morton Keator Hemenway strode forward at once.

"Your Honor," he stated. "My clients are now prepared to plead."

"Very well," agreed Tilbury Jones. "Let 'em."

Hemenway looked rather helplessly at the Judge, waited a moment, then signed them to step forward.

"Are you guilty or not guilty?" demanded the Judge.

"Your Honor," Hemenway interrupted. "I protest against the wording of that question. It calls for the defendants to unnecessarily incriminate themselves. The crime with which they are charged has not been clearly stated as yet, I believe."

"They are charged with cattle rustling and brand blotching," Tilbury Jones said. "Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty, your honor," was the unanimous reply.

"Hell," swore the Marshal. "Why, we caught 'em red-handed, in the act, Judge."

"I don't doubt it any," agreed the Judge, drily.

"Your Honor, I protest," exclaimed Hemenway. "This method seems to me rather a pre-trial of the case. No witnesses have been called as yet. And for you to express a judicial opinion as to guilt or innocence, in advance, is—"

"Is entirely within my rights," Tilbury Jones interrupted. "You do not seem to be familiar with the procedure of this court, Mr. Hemenway. Our idea here is to arrive at the truth, not to try

and clutter it up all we can. A cattle-thief's word ain't worth a damn, and never was. We will now call our witnesses and proceed—"

"I rather think not, Judge." Hemenway's voice was coldly decisive. "This, as you have stated, is only a preliminary hearing, at which the defendants have been permitted to make their pleas. Having pleaded 'not guilty,' they are entitled to the statutory period before trial, in which to prepare their defense. Moreover, I challenge your right to try on such a serious offence as this, being only a justice of the peace. I even challenge your authority as judge at all, and demand to see your appointment to office."

Morton Keator Hemenway looked around for approval. Strangely, it did not seem to be forthcoming, with the possible exception of the prisoners, who regarded him hopefully but doubtfully. His antics might amount to something, and save for his intervention, they realized that they would already be wearing hempen neckties. Which, they were willing to concede, was only to be expected, and nothing more than justice, since they had made the mistake of getting caught.

Tilbury Jones considered. As Hemenway had guessed, he held no portfolio of office from city, county or state. He had merely set up in business as judge some years before, with Jack Cameron as his Marshal, and had not bothered himself about the finer points of law, as to whether or not he had authority to impose a maximum sentence. If a horse or cattle thief was caught and found guilty, on the testimony of credible witnesses, he was hung, and that was all there was to it..

Lawlessness had flourished as an organized industry over the whole section of country, when Tilbury Jones and Jack Cameron had arrived. They had brought law and order to the country, and maintained it with a firm hand. Consequently, every law-abiding citizen was solidly behind them. Tilbury Jones was the law, and no one, until the arrival of Morton Keator Hemenway, had thought to dispute the fact or even to question it.

"Your questions, suh," replied Tilbury Jones, calmly, "constitute contempt of this honorable court. You are hereby fined the sum of forty dollars, suh, and warned not to repeat the offence."

For a moment, Morton Keator Hemenway was staggered. But for a moment only. Then he protested, volubly. Tilbury Jones turned to the Marshal.

"Jack," he said. "If I was to tell you to take them cattle-thieves out and string them up, you'd do it, wouldn't you?"

"Just give the word, Judge," invited Jack Cameron, eagerly.

"And if I was to ask you to add this here lawyer to the list, it wouldn't cause any great amount of extra trouble, would it?" proceeded the Judge.

"Not a dog-goned bit, Judge," agreed the Marshal. "It'd be a pleasure."

Tilbury Jones turned back to the slightly white-faced Hemenway.

"As soon as you pay your fine, suh, court will be in recess until a later date," he said.

Without a word, Morton Keator Hemenway paid over the sum that he had collected from the four prisoners.

JUDGE TILBURY JONES had won the initial skirmish, but by very slight odds, as he realized. Ordinarily, the four prisoners would already have been disposed of, and the matter settled. As it was, they were still to be tried, and the matter presented complications.

Justice, in and about Bottlerib, had been a short and honest affair, uncluttered by the machinery of law. It had been the earnest endeavor of Tilbury Jones to arrive at the truth, by the most direct route possible. If a man was innocent, that was all right. If guilty, he would be punished as the offence merited, according to customary procedure of the countryside and Tilbury Jones' opinion. There had never been a word of protest, save occasionally from the prisoners themselves. The country was solidly behind the Judge.

It was still behind him, he realized. But a crisis in his affairs had arrived in the person of Morton Keator Hemenway. More than that, it was a crisis that involved the countryside as well. And its fate was in the Judge's hands also.

Hemenway, in Tilbury Jones' opinion had the usual somewhat warped intellect of his class. He believed in doing things according to the machinery of the law. Even if a man was guilty, and everybody knew it, and the man was willing to plead guilty, Hemenway felt that it was not justice, and certainly not law to let it go at that. Instead, there must be a bill of expense, a lot of cluttering up of the machinery of justice, and a fat fee for the lawyer, in an endeavor to prove the man innocent. If he should be set free to continue his depredations on society, a man known to be a criminal, that, in Hemenway's opinion, was merely a proof of how good a lawyer he was.

If, on the other hand, the attorney for the prosecution should be able to prove an innocent man apparently guilty, and see him hang for an offense which he had not committed, it was perhaps to be deplored, but certainly the best thing, so long as it was done according to due process of law. That was all that mattered.

All lawyers were not of that type, Tilbury Jones conceded, but Hemenway certainly was, and if he won in this case, then civilization, with all its attendant disadvantages, would come to Bottlerib. No longer would justice, keen-eyed and swift, sit upon its throne. Instead, blindfolded by the law, it would be led in a maze of bewildering by-paths, to end up, as frequently as not, in the mire. In his native state of Kentucky, Tilbury Jones had been permitted to see the workings of the law, and he abhorred it as a monster usually at odds with justice.

Hemenway had aroused new hope in the breasts of the four admittedly guilty criminals under arrest, as the coming of an unscrupulous lawyer usually does arouse hope in the criminal. Tilbury Jones knew something of the four men, knew that they would be backed in this latest fight against justice and the law itself by other lawless men of the countryside, some of whom lived under the guise of the law, and were both rich and influential.

They would back Hemenway to the limit, with both money and influence. If Tilbury Jones allowed the case to come to trial, they would demand to see his authority in such a case as this, though it had never before been challenged. That demand would probably be transmitted to outside and higher officials, in such a way that the law, as interpreted by Morton Keator Hemenway, would soon become intrenched in Bottlerib and its environs. When that happened, not only would Tilbury Jones be defeated, but so would all the law-abiding citizens who relied on him to protect them against the criminal element.

If he brought it to trial and allowed Hemenway to win, that would be setting known criminals loose, which was something that a gentleman could not do. Moreover, while perhaps postponing the fatal day of reckoning, it would be bowing in defeat. And Tilbury Jones was not the man to bow in defeat to anyone.

There seemed to be only the first alternative—to have his Marshal hang the lawyer, and be done with it. That would settle it, and would properly cow the criminal element, as well as effectually discourage other lawyers from venturing into a territory where they were not wanted. Yes, it was the ideal solution—only, as a gentleman, Tilbury Jones could not thus take advantage of a helpless opponent.

For the next couple of days, days during which Morton Keator Hemenway consulted with his clients in the jail and worked on their defense, Tilbury Jones considered his problem. Then, one afternoon, he astonished Morton Keator Hemenway by accosting him in friendly fashion on the street, and invited him in to Tilbury Jones' Saloon to have a little drink.

Morton Keator Hemenway accepted the invitation, and, before he left, he had several little drinks. It was really excellent liquor which Tilbury Jones served to his special guests, and Hemenway prided himself on being somewhat of a connoisseur in the matter. Possessing a certain streak of canniness, he was willing to accept anything which might be free.

During the course of the day, he also made two other pleasing discoveries. One, that the Judge was rather a pleasant, friendly sort of a man socially. The second discovery, which secretly gratified young Mr. Hemenway immensely, was that after two or three rounds, Judge Jones became rather "under the influence" and after two or three more, he was practically "under the table." Whereas Morton Keator Hemenway was not affected at all by so few drinks.

This ability to more than match the Judge, drink for drink, pleased Hemenway increasingly, as he heard comments

to the effect that the Judge was a "two-bottle man" and that he must himself be an individual of outstanding ability. These friendly little meetings grew to be a daily ritual. Then, in the midst of one, the Judge leaned forward confidentially.

"We'll hold that trial tomorrow," he declared. "I reckon, suh, that you must have your case all prepared by now."

"Well — yes," conceded Hemenway, with owlish gravity. "I guesh—guesh sho—so. But there was someshing—shomething — something—let me think. Something of great grav'ty. Oh yes. Now I remember. Your jurisdiction in this case, Judge."

"Oh, that." Tilbury Jones beamed. "If you wish to challenge it, Mr. Hemenway, the proper time will be at the opening of the case. All proper arguments will be heard then."

"Thash — that's fair enough," Morton Keator Hemenway conceded.

ON THE following morning, accordingly, he was all business. But, dropping into the court room, he discovered that there had been some slight misunderstanding, and the prisoners had not yet been brought up from the jail. Accordingly, until court should convene, he was not adverse to having a little drink or so with the Judge. He was fully confident of his ability to remain sober longer than Tilbury Jones, and so to be master of any situation which might arise.

One little drink, however, led to another. And, though Morton Keator Hemenway was not aware wherein lay the difference, he was moved to comment on the special excellence of the liquor today. Of its added potency he was not at the moment aware, and by the time he might have been aware of it, he was scarcely in a mood to gauge such trivial matters at all. Three ordinary drinks were one thing. Three out of this bottle were like so much liquid dynamite.

Yet, once again, he was secretly gratified to be able to match the Judge, drink for drink. He was aroused from an owlish contemplation of his glass, which, like the widow's curse, never seemed to be empty, no matter how often he raised it to his lips, by the entrance of the Marshal with the prisoners. Since a general round of liquidation was indulged in, however, before the trial commenced, the matter had completely slipped his mind by the time Tilbury Jones, to all appearances as sober as a judge had ought to be, called the court to order.

The prisoners had been glancing with increasing apprehension toward their counsel. Now Tilbury Jones likewise glanced toward him, but Morton Keator Hemenway had pillowed his head in his arms, on the table, and gone to sleep. There was a trace of pity, mingled with contempt, in Tilbury Jones' voice, as he instructed them not to disturb his slumbers. A gentleman, according to the strict code of the Judge, should be able to carry his liquor. If he failed to gauge his own capacity, he ceased to be a gentleman.

* * *

It was a new dawn before Morton Keator Hemenway awoke, with a head that didn't seem to belong to him, and a rather hazy recollection of events. He was, incomprehensively, in his own bed. Groaning, he took a copious drink of water, thoughtfully provided, and crossed to the window. There he rubbed his eyes and stared anew. His lower jaw sagged at what he saw.

A big cottonwood tree, standing at the edge of town, had borne fruit overnight — fruit which was still hanging, swaying gently in the breeze. Hemenway stared at his erstwhile promising clients for a long moment in dismay.

Then, dressing in kindling anger, he hurried out to do something about it. The first man whom he encountered chanced to be Marshal Jack Cameron.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded Hemenway, pointing indignantly. "Has Judge Jones dared to do such a thing—hold court and hang those men without giving them a fair trial, or allowing me, as their attorney, to be present? If he has, he'll pay for it, and so will you, as an officer of the court."

Marshal Cameron viewed him somewhat pityingly.

"Why, no, nothin' like that," he protested. "I distinctly remember that the Judge told you about the trial, and you was there, sittin' at the attorney's bench, all through the whole trial, yesterday. Don't you remember?"

Morton Keator Hemenway did remember—to a certain extent. He had a hazy recollection of the prisoners being brought in to court, but beyond that his thoughts were chaotic. He clutched at a straw.

"But Judge Jones had no jurisdiction, in such a case as this," he protested. "He was not qualified to try them."

"He asked that very thing, if anyone wanted to protest his jurisdiction," Marshal Cameron explained. "And nobody said a word."

"He got me drunk," Hemenway charged. "He must have framed up on me. Ordinarily, I can take two drinks for every one of his."

Jack Cameron laughed, but not unkindly.

"As near as I could count, Tilbury Jones took twice as many drinks as you did, yesterday," he asserted. "And out of the same bottles. Why, young feller, the Judge can drink any man, or any group of men, one at a time, under the table, and still be sober as an owl. Didn't you know that?"

The cataclysmic truth was slowly dawning on Morton Keator Hemenway. He understood the code, not only the gentleman's code of Tilbury Jones, but the rough and ready one of the West. Under neither code would he be excused. And he had been present at the trial—and had failed, utterly. He would be a laughing-stock in this community forever after. But his mind, narrow at best, clutched at one last chance.

"They had a lot of money on them," he said hopefully, indicating the erstwhile defendants. "And I had four hundred dollars coming from them, for professional services."

"Why, I guess they did have just about that much money," Cameron agreed. "But at the start of the hearing, the Judge, he fined them each a hundred dollars, for carryin' concealed weapons when they was first arrested. And after that they pleaded guilty to everything."

Morton Keator Hemenway's jaw sagged. He fingered the few coins remaining in his pocket. Yes, it would be enough, barely enough, to get back, as he viewed it, to civilization.

"I think," he said, "that I'll be leaving this country—and will locate elsewhere."

Jack Cameron beamed.

"That's the most sensible thing I've ever heard you say," he declared approvingly.

FOR THRILLING ADVENTURE STORIES READ
POPULAR FICTION MAGAZINE
15c ON SALE NOW 15c

Horse Outfits

An Article

By E. W. THISTLETHWAITE

THERE are a whole lot of people—in this part of the country—who spend their vacation in the mountains, going by car generally, as far as there are roads, and then hiring horses so as to get away back where there is good fishing, hunting, etc. There are a good many outfits along the more travelled routes that make a business of hiring out horses and sometimes guides, but these hombres aren't backward a little bit when it comes to charging for their services, so the average person would do a whole lot better to try and

get mounts from some small mountain rancher who quite likely may have more horses than he knows what to do with, and will be glad to get rid of a few for a week or two in order to save on feed.

Next comes the question of how many horses you're going to need. This depends a good deal on the kind of country you're going to be in, and how long you intend staying. The altitude and the time of year will, of course, have a good deal to do with the size of your blanket roll. As it is out of the question to load down your riding horses with camping equipment unless you are prepared to travel very light indeed, the only way out is to have a pack horse. A party of three or more ought to have two pack horses.

Before dropping the subject of horses I would like to emphasize the importance of having every animal properly shod all around, before starting on any kind of a trip in rough country. Shoes that have been on a long time should be pulled off and re-set, even tho they may not be worn much. If you're going where it's impossible to get such things, a few extra shoes should be taken along, together with the necessary tools for putting them on. It is not very difficult to tack a shoe on a horse, and any kind of a looking job is better than letting him go barefoot. When a horse does cast a shoe you should always, if possible, back track and try to find it, as it will probably fit better than anything you will have along. An amateur is not likely to make much of a job of shaping a cold shoe with only a rock for an anvil.

In the summer time, unless you're going into a country where thunder storms are frequent, it is unnecessary to take a tent. If you *do* happen to get caught in a storm, a good wool blanket, tightly stretched, lean-to style will make a pretty good shelter. Of course if you like a tent, there's no reason why you shouldn't take one, provided you're not loaded down too much with other stuff. Second-hand army pup tents are not bad, or you can get a pyramid tent that can be supported by a short piece of rope from a tree limb or three poles set up tepee style.

Some people seem to like tents made of oiled silk or some similar material, as being lighter and less bulky. These advantages would appeal to a man if he had to pack his entire outfit on his back, but where pack horses are used, I believe that an ordinary canvas tent would be the most satisfactory. Never try to carry poles with you, unless yu're going into a treeless country, and then take only light folding ones.

For food of course you'll have to suit your own particular taste. There's just one rule you must be guided by—don't pick out a lot of heavy stuff like canned goods, potatoes and the like. Also don't take breakables—they're a lot more trouble than they are worth. Foods that will not spoil readily, and that occupy small space are the kind you should select. Things like dried apples, prunes, raisins, rice etc. Bacon, of course, and beans are almost always included, likewise flour and baking powder. If in addition you have along a .22 rifle and a fishing line, you ought to eat pretty well.

ABOUT packing this stuff—blankets and tent, can be lashed onto a horse without much trouble, the only thing required being a good rope, thirty to forty feet long. The rest of your miscellaneous camp equipment though, is a different proposition, and the only way to save yourself a lot of grief is to have along a pack saddle and kyacks, pack bags made of canvas or rawhide, usually made of a size just to fit two five gallon oil cans side by side. They are equipped with loops and hang on each side of a pack saddle.

In the case of a riding saddle, it's a lot better to have your own too. Some outfits have a bunch of old hulls laying around, but you might easily have trouble in borrowing anything decent, and an uncomfortable saddle is likely to take most of the joy out of a long day's ride.

In regard to weight, from twenty-five to thirty pounds is about right for a riding saddle. Of course a saddle that is intended for heavy stock work is usually a little heavier, but the tendency nowadays is to make them as light as possible. However, unless speed is important, or you want to jump your horse over rocks, logs etc., or across gullies, a few pounds more or less does not make much difference. A comfortable fit and proper ventilation are much more important.

For this reason I would avoid saddles offered by the large mail order department stores. I would not say they are no good, probably some would prove satisfactory enough, but cheapness is the main thing taken into consideration when they are made. There are many ways in which a dollar or two can be saved in the making of a saddle, and perhaps the most common, as it does not show from the outside, is to put in an inferior tree. If you do much riding with a rigging like this, a sore backed horse is the inevitable result, as the bars of the tree are certain, sooner or later, to spread, warp or crack, even if they were correctly shaped at first.

WHEN you place an order with a regular saddlery firm, your saddle is made up specially for you, and is guaranteed in every particular. The price is not much higher either.

A second hand saddle is O. K. provided it bears the stamp of the maker on seat, back cantle, skirt or fender. If a manufacturer does not care to put his name on a saddle, it must be an inferior article.

To have a good blanket under it, is almost as important as having a good saddle. A Navajo or a woven, porous hair blanket is the best; otherwise a good quality, folded wool blanket will do. Don't try to make shift with any old thing—you can't get away with it. Also, do not buy a stuffed pad.

Some fellows ride all the time with a full rigged bridle on top of a heavy leather halter. I've always thought that was mighty tough on a horse, and very unnecessary. A light riding hackamore with a hair macarte (lead rope) is not so bad, and looks nice, but even in that case you ought to have a light weight bridle. Really, neither halter nor hackamore are necessary, as a horse can be tied up just as well with a rope around his neck so long as it is tied with a knot that will not slip—a common bowline takes care of that O. K.

Judging by the firearms that some tenderfeet campers pack into the mountains, I imagine they must figure on having to defend themselves against Indians, grizzly bears etc. This, of course, is crazy, and unless you're actually going hunting, a twenty-two rifle is about all in the way of artillery that you'll need. Of course in some parts of the country you may run across coyotes or bobcats, possibly even a lion, and in that case it's nice to have a cannon along, but promiscuous shooting in a stock or game country with high powered rifles is not looked upon with favor. A lot of cattle are killed every year by careless hunters.

If you *do* pack a rifle, even a twenty-two, the only convenient way is to have it in an open top saddle scabbard, slung almost horizontally under your left stirrup leather, the stock of the gun to the front. I've seen saddle scabbards made out of leather so thin and poor that it is

more like brown paper than anything else—these things are quite useless, but heavy skirting leather scabbards which are priced at about five dollars, are made by nearly all saddle manufacturers, and will give many years of service.

You can get along fairly well without a scabbard, by fixing a long strap or thong around the stock of your rifle just back of the trigger guard, and looping the end over your saddle horn. The barrel of the rifle can be supported by slipping it through a loop made by tying the rear saddle strings together In this way the rifle hangs just as it would in a scabbard, and when you want to get it into action, you just have to flip the forward strap off the horn and jerk your gun forward and up. The barrel slips out of the back loop alright so long as you raise it slightly so the front sight won't catch. The one trouble is that the forward strap has to stay on the gun all the time. A regular saddle gun, equipped with a ring on the left side of the receiver, can be carried pretty well hanging in an up and down position, by a short thong tied into the ring and looped over the saddle horn.

Other things you want to take are an axe and a rope. If you have a pack horse, it is well worth while to take a long handled axe. Cutting wood, driving stakes etc., with a little camp axe is a miserable business, but with a really decent tool it is more of a pleasure. As for a rope, I would advise getting about forty feet of good three strand seven-sixteenth manilla, and tying a honda in it yourself. It is cheaper than buying a made-up riata, and will do you just as good—most cowboys get their rope that way. Even if you can't throw it to any extent, you'll find lots of uses for it. Few people ride in the mountains without a rope.

In regard to a stake rope, if you're going to use one. It should be about the same length and thickness as the riata. Of course if the feed is good, a horse does not need much rope, but it is better to have plenty as you don't need to let it out full length. You can, if necessary, use your riata, and save packing an extra rope, but tying knots in it will spoil it for throwing purposes.

If you have to picket horses out for the night, be careful to see that they are far enough apart so they can't get their ropes tangled up. Also see that they can't get them wrapped around bushes and rocks. Really I believe horses are better hobbled, in which case you want to put a bell on one and perhaps even keep one horse staked out so you can more easily round up the others in the morning. Some horses are used to being staked, others hobbled, so it's a good idea to ask the man you get them from, which is the best way to handle them.

Even though you may have a pack horse or two, it's nice to be able to carry a few things right with you, and the only convenient way to do this is to have a pair of saddle pockets tied on behind your cantle. Most of the Army and Navy stores throughout the country sell old army saddle bags, and although they don't run much to looks, they serve the purpose very well and are a good deal larger than regular stock saddle pockets. The latter can be had, however, from any saddlery firm, and they will be made exactly to fit your saddle if you send a paper pattern which fits around the back of your cantle. If you're getting a new saddle made, a pair of pockets can be built right on it, cheaper than you can buy a detachable pair.

NOW ABOUT your personal rigging. To begin with your underwear is important. Don't judge by what you commonly wear in town. Even though the weather may seem hot, select

a material that contains a large percentage of wool. You're bound to sweat at times, no matter what you're wearing, and when you ride out onto some windy ridge, or down into the shadow of some canyon you're going to be mighty glad of your woollen underwear —it will help to tone down the cooling off process. Of course I don't mean for you to get garments a foot thick, but they ought to be a trifle heavier than you are used to, and the material wool.

I suppose that in making selection for your general get-up, the first thing you'd think of is a pair of short riding pants and puttees, yet to my mind, that is just about the most all round uncomfortable rig that anyone could select for riding. As far as I personally am concerned, I wouldn't think of riding half a mile with any kind of footwear other than regular riding boots.

I think it more than likely that about nine-tenths of you people that are reading this article will know — because you've been told so many times—that it's just about impossible to do any walking in cowboy boots. Without giving you too much of a jolt, I want to explode that idea. I admit, however, that most cowboy boots are not very *good* to walk in—for example. The main things that are supposed to give trouble, are the general tight fit, and the high heel. It is true enough that many riders like a close fit and a very high heel, but *that is just a matter of personal choice.* As you possibly know, most cowboys have their boots made to measure, and among the many questions asked on the self-measurement blanks they have to fill in, are "do you want a close or an easy fit?" and "what height do you want the heel?" Thus you can have as easy a fitting boot as you like, any height in the leg, and the heel may be made as low as an inch and a half without in anyway spoiling the boot. As for weight, they are a great deal lighter than the high laced sport boots that are used so much in hiking. No matter how comfortable a boot may be, it is well to be able to put on something else for a change at the end of a day's ride, and for that reason I think it is quite worth while to take along a spare pair of light shoes.

As for pants, I guess about nine cowboys out of ten wear those copper riveted, blue canvas "overalls" you've seen advertised all over the country with a picture of two horses trying—apparently without much success—to pull a pair apart. Myself, I don't take much stock in that picture, I certainly wouldn't let a pair of mine take part in no such experiment, but at that, as garments, they're a right tough proposition, and will outwear anything I ever heard tell of, with the possible exception of certain very heavy all wool pants which are suitable only for cold weather. They don't run very much to looks of course, and if you prefer a khaki whipcord or a good moleskin, you'll get good service. Corduroy, as material for riding pants, I have little use for.

Light blue chambray shirts seem to go pretty generally with the overalls mentioned above. They wear very well, but a medium light-weight wool flannel is more comfortable on the whole, especially when the evenings come in chilly, as they do in the higher mountains. Gray is the most practical color, though some of the new fancy checks or plaids are good for not showing dirt.

Some kind of an extra garment is also necessary, even in the summer time. Some fellows like a vest, on account of the pockets, others prefer a sweater or a canvas hunting coat. Myself, I like one of those leather-sleeved vests that have become so common during the last few years. They have the advantage of sleeves and pockets, and are, moreover,

more or less wind proof, besides being short enough to be comfortable when you're in the saddle.

As for a hat, I might just advise you to get the "best that money can buy" —only I know you wouldn't do it, because it would cost you the price of a good horse. What I do advise is, that you get the best you can afford. A three and a half inch brim is enough to give you pretty good protection, and a No. 1 Stetson of this size costs nine or ten dollars. Other makes, which, if they don't give you the same pride of ownership, will yet give excellent service, cost from five to six dollars. I do not recommend anybody to get a wool hat. They are cheap alright, but in quality as well as price.

While we're on the subject of hats, I want to get the notion out of your head that a hat is liable to blow off in a wind. Cowboys do not wear chin straps or strings under their back hair or anything at all to hold their hats on, yet it's the rarest possible thing for a rider to have his "war bonnet" blown off, even in a wind you can lean against.

A good many fellows look on a pair of gloves as a necessity, and certainly a pair does come in mighty handy lots of times, but here again you want to be careful to get the right kind. Those with the big, fancy stitched cuffs, and the long fringe, while they look pretty, are made exclusively for dudes and would-be cowboys. They are often made of good enough leather, but on account of the cuffs, they're a whole lot more of a nuisance than anything else. You want a pair of gloves you can fold up and put in your pocket. A good pair of short buckskin or horsehide gloves with either snap button or drawstring fastener are about what you need. They'll cost you from two and a half to three dollars, but they'll wear a long time and won't go hard after being wet. Horsehide is better than buckskin in this respect.

There are just one or two other suggestions I'd like to make. About a silk bandana to go round your neck, for example. Unless you want to look like a movie cowboy, don't bother to get one —you'll never need it. Leather cuffs,I would put in the same class, as being more ornamental than useful, although I've known men who liked to wear them day and night. Chaps likewise are unnecessary. Unless the weather is particularly cold or wet, they're more of a nuisance than anything else.

Unless you have a very good horse under you, a pair of medium weight spurs are useful and worth while. Never take a quirt—you're sure to lose it. A romal at the end of your bridle reins is about the best thing you can have in the way of a whip. The end of your lead rope, or a ten foot loop in the middle of your riata, leaving the main coil tied to the saddle are pretty effective, and reasonably handy, and have this advantage, that you can't lose them.

There's just a final word that I leave to the last because I think it is the most important. It's this: *In traveling on horseback never forget that you have a living animal under you and not a machine.*

IF YOU HAVEN'T READ A COPY OF
POPULAR FICTION MAGAZINE
YOU ARE MISSING THE BEST 15c BUY
IN THE ADVENTURE STORY FIELD

The Frozen Gods

BY
JACK BERTIN

Dornwood slapped the Southland man contemptuously, his great hand sending Erskine hurtling back to the corner.

THE ICY hand of the blizzard closed ever tighter around the little black blotch, with its lighted squares of windows, that men called Post Desolation. Desolation—the word seemed echoed in the howl of the flake-laden winds, which steadily, for days, out of the frozen blackness of the north, had whipped around the squat structure of logs.

The Post had been well named. But a lost, insignificant dot it was—a fleck of warmth on the fringe of that white immensity that blankets the planet's tip. Here Cold was king; ruling with rigid scepter the somber regions of Arctic twilight — taking little stock of the creatures that with cunning artifice of protecting walls and wood and fire strove to nullify his harsh decrees.

It was a grim land—a land of naked wants and dulled passions; of frozen waterways and endless plains of whiteness that melted away into the flaring, unearthly color-laughter of the Aurora. Little use was there for warmth of blood or immaterial endeavors; favored were broad-lunged chests and wide nostrils and the stolid endurance of the long trails.

It was hardly the place for Benjamin

Erskine. No cosmic shuffle of men and things had ever struck a stranger combination than the fur lined walls of Post Desolation and the man who had sought their shelter from the blizzard's fury.

Some such thoughts mulled slowly and methodically in the one track mind of Factor McDowell. It was the third night. And again, as on the two previous, the man would not sleep.

BENJAMIN ERSKINE was undoubtedly mad. The Factor grunted as he thought of the many he had seen go mad, and rave unendingly at the mocking silence that closed down and around. But Erskine was different.

He was from the States—from somewhere in another world where the sun climbed away from the earth's hiding rim and shed himself in golden profuseness over warm, smiling fields. McDowell knew, and had heard the Indians tell of others of the man's kind, who, when the Arctic's frozen hand had unnerved their reticence, babbled incessantly of softly flowing streams and balmy breezes. To McDowell, himself a half-blood born to the service of Hudson Bay as well as to the Indians, these were dreams, dreams of madmen. Erskine was different, but his eyes gave him away. The Factor's head nodded ponderously. They were all alike in one thing—the men of the Southlands. They did not fit in the North—could not last in the country of the Tumbling Bear and its ice-locked tributaries. The cold and silence wrenched their minds loose, and they died as swiftly as their hairless, soft dogs.

Like some ruminating musk-ox strayed from the herd and munching in the shelter of a storm-whipped hill, Factor McDowell shifted his thoughts, his eyes upon the man sitting by the great squat stove. Occasionally his gaze would swing around to the pile of furs in the farther corner and the figure sprawled upon them; asleep.... and from there to the window, the frost rimmed panes of which were beating back the tiny, innumerable assaults of the shrieking storm.

The Factor found himself growling. He would be relieved when the blizzard was over, and Meelna's tribe once more located at the Post. The snow had somewhere halted the fur-laden Indians.

McDowell's stolid courage was experiencing some doubts. It was a strange company to house—two mad men and a wild dog.

Over the trail from Fort Endurance they had come, the stranger from the Southlands — and Renny Dornwood. They were going on, straight north. Why? Dornwood had shrugged his great shoulders. And that had settled it, for all questions were answered when Dornwood shrugged.

News travels slowly in the far North; gossip, like the land, is frozen. Yet all men, red, white, or Eskimo yellow, had heard of Renny Dornwood. The name was familiar talk in trading post, skin tepee, or frowning trooper quarters. And everywhere the opinion was unanimous. Renny Dornwood was a devil.

There was but one devil as great in the whole country—and that was his own dog. Years back, in the gray of the eternal twilight that blankets the upper reaches of the Yukon, a Russian camp had missed the great wolfhound whose litters were the pride of her owner. The mating urge had taken her beyond the bondage of man. And that union between the great Siberian and her wolfish spouse had given Muk-luk to the world—one hundred and twenty pounds of steel-sprung muscle, of snarling, fang-clicking viciousness; a gray-white shadow ruled by hate and fear.

Muk-luk obeyed but one voice; knew only one master—Renny Dornwood.

Who Dornwood really was the North never was told, and his known deeds soon overshadowed the question of his origin. The giant sourdough was a mystery in a country of naked exposures. Seldom did he speak save in riddles, never laughed but his laughter chilled with its fierce, grim exultation. Men whispered that the stark cruelty of the North lived in his blood; had become part of his make-up. He was no person with whom could be exchanged those large confidences that mark a trait of humanity in the lonely places of earth. He made no friends, rode rough shod over chance enemies. A Hercules of muscle and bone insensible to cold; possessed of lungs of tensile iron that laughed at trail labor which left seasoned mushers prostrated. A grim-lipped face, whipped and chiselled to granite hardness by the icy lashes of many winds; eyes that were cold, bleak windows of remorseless strength. Such was Renny Dornwood, and men walked softly in his presence.

Benjamine Erskine had been told many things about the man, at Fort Endurance. To all he had turned a deaf ear, once a certain question was answered. Renny Dornwood knew more of the country to the north than any man alive. A second question had brought an equally satisfying reply. Dornwood cared nothing for gold. A short talk with the taciturn giant had boiled anew in Erskine's breast the greed that had taken him thousands of miles; held him to his quest in this nightmare land of silence and cold.

So, despite all warnings, matters had been arranged—matters that made the soft Erskine trail-mate to Renny Dornwood on an unknown venture into the north. The fever of greed burned undiminished in the adventurer from the South, held back the fear that had begun to prey upon him by the day they had reached Post Desolation, squatting almost unseen on the frozen banks of the Little Tumbler.

NOW HE was shifting by the side of the roaring stove, shifting ever more and more restlessly. McDowell was watching stolidly from behind the counter; his breed wife methodically sorted furs at the farther end; the wind's shriek, ebbing, rising, seemed echoed in lower undertone by the regular deep breathing that came from the sleeping Dornwood.

Erskine suddenly thrust back his chair with violent, nervous movement. McDowell did not even blink. It was to be expected—that, and the raving that would follow. Why did these fools ever come north.

Erskine's voice rasped out.

"To hell with the blizzard! I'm going on!"

Surprise affected the Factor. Here was madness taking a different course.

"Through that?" he asked in his deep gutteral; eyes sweeping to the window.

"Can't help that. Got to keep going! Got to wake him up!" This last was accompanied by an uneasy fear that leaped to his eyes.

McDowell voiced an uncertain opinion. No man could foretell the actions of Renny Dornwood.

"He will na go."

"He's got to go! I'm paying him to go!" The fear washed out of his eyes; he strode to the corner, shook the sleeping man. "Renny!"

The rasp in his voice strained thin as the bleak eyes bored his own. It was a trait of Dornwood's — to wake from deep sleep into instant, crouching readiness.

"Dornwood—we're going on! I won't stay cooped up here another—minute!"

McDowell protested. It was a fierce

night outside. Ordinary men could scarcely live in that wind-whipped fury. No one could limit Dornwood, but certainly his companion was physically below the standard of ordinary, as the term was understood in the Tumbling Bear country. It was suicide for him to venture away from walls and fire. The Factor voiced this opinion in his tainted Scotch, emphatically.

Dornwood heaved himself erect, his chill eyes sweeping the room; lingering on the snow repelling window.

"You want to go on? In that?"

He laughed approvingly at the other's nod. The Factor's eyes widened as they watched the man stride to the door and listen at the latch, listen long, intently.

Erskine looked askance, fear again stealing into his haggard, pinched face.

Dornwood strode back to the room's center, jerked his thumb toward the window.

"Hear 'em?"

Erskine moistened dry lips. He could hear nothing but the howl of the sweeping wind.

"Who?"

The other's great shoulders lifted. His gaze mocked Erskine.

"Who? Who piles the fourteen foot drifts, clear to Bering, row on row, sifting, always sifting? You can hear 'em in the timber wolf's howl—the gods of this land—the frozen gods!" Again he craned his neck in that position of still, uncanny listening. "They're out there, waiting!"

Fear grew in Erskine's heart, momentarily banishing his greed. His own obsession ran but to gold, and a spirit formed in far away city slums shuddered at what it saw in those bleak eyes. But the lust that had taken him thousands of miles swung up again, unheeding. Storms or mad guides could not keep him back.

"Can we live through it?" he ignored the other's queer words.

Dornwood did not reply, seemed to ponder as he stood there, as if the faint wind howls carried messages he alone heard. Finally he grunted, low, deep, and for answer pointed to the snowshoes and furs upon the walls.

"Allright. Fur up!"

His giant figure passed through the door separating the room from the storehouse beyond, leaving Erskine and the Factor alone. The gold-seeker found himself at the counter, many questions on his lips.

"What kind of a man is he? What I mean, is he dangerous? Crazy dangerous?"

McDowell shrugged. "I dinna know. No mon knows Renny Dornwood. If ye will listen.... go back!"

"Why?"

"Ye will die, mon; die! The North is no place for soft skin, or hearts." The Factor was blunt. "Ye will na live through thot, and if ye do, there will be the cold. Cold, mon! Forty-five below. No walls, nae fire—fire that ye can call fire."

"But Dornwood has been that way before! He told me so. Close to where I

want to go! Three days trip, he says." Erskine glanced furtively at the closed door. "There's one thing about him gives me the creeps — what is this he raves about the frozen gods? Some Eskimo story?"

The Factor blinked. An unbridgable gulf separated him from his questioner. The North's frigid hand had carved Sandy McDowell; solidified its ponderous, unflinching seriousness in his soul. The language of the other, quick, city-born, frothy, sprayed meaningless over him, like a wave over a weather scarred rock.

"The frozen gods?" He shrugged slowly, and pointed to the window. Erskine started nervously, but his quick glance revealed nothing save the frost-rimmed panes.

"Out there! Take gude advice, mon—go back! No wan has ever left for thot country beyond, and come back—except Renny. Some hae gone wi' him, but none come back!"

Erskine's lips writhed into a swift, malevolent sneer. He patted his hip.

"I'm paying him, and he'll play straight, or he'll be the one left behind! The North? T'hell with this hard stuff! Dornwood may be a big noise in this country—but he's got no mama's boy here!" The glint of the killer shone from his eyes; the breed of killers fostered in the narrow steel canyons of a civilization leagues beyond the earth's hiding rim.

THE DOOR behind the counter swung open, and Dornwood strode in, the frost thick upon his heavy woolens. At his heels slunk a gray-white, sinuous shadow—Muk-luk. Erskine drew back as the husky's fangs gleamed in a silent snarl.

Without a word Dornwood donned his trail outfit, drawing the parka close around his granite features. A curt salute of head toward the Factor, and he pulled open the door, following the dog outside in a swirl of driving flakes.

Erskine hesitated — glanced at the stove — at the tinkling window panes, and swore half undecided. His nerves were strained. From the complex life to which he was adapted he had leaped with bewildering suddenness into a primitive, stark desolation. His plane and pilot were both forever stilled somewhere south of Dawson. He had struggled on alone, the unquenchable fever burning ever brighter against the dictates of the dread which warned him back. This was the devil's own country —endless miles of mocking silence, of white, cruel serenity; men who grunted at rare intervals, and looked askance at his flow of speech—and last and worse than all the giant guide with his limitless strength and mocking riddles.

Benjamin Erskine had held a certain repute in the lower sections of a city renowned for the quick efficiency of its underworld justice. He had been a power, in his own way. The pride that went with it rose in him now, as he looked nervously around the great, fur-lined room—it swept away his hesitation in a blaze of determined rage. He would take that gold back, if he had to struggle through every storm and shoot every guide in the accursed country.

He clothed himself in his heavy furs, and slung the webbed shoes under his arm. "Good bye!" The short call was sent to the man behind the counter, and the speaker strode out.

McDowell slowly moved around the long bench. Drawing up his short collar, he walked to the heavy door, pulled it open, and squinted out into the night.

The yellow light from the window glinted on tumbled drifts. A long sled, the reluctant dogs facing north, stood just beyond the pale glow. In the swirl he made out two dim figures, one just

huddling down upon the sled. The other cracked a long, hissing lash. "Mush-o-an! Mush!" The cry came faintly through the howling whirl of the wind as the sled faded into the black welter.

The Factor closed the door, shaking the snow from his great head. He listened to the wind, as it whistled savagely, tugging at the stolid log corners of the building. Again his head shook, slowly. Death was riding into the storm.

THEY had won through. Through the numbed mind of Benjamin Erskine this fact ran monotonously, pealingly; seemingly written on every silent, laden pine beyond the curving lane of unmarked white that showed the course of the Porcupine. Occasionally he swore, writhed to throw off the spell which was locking him in numbing embrace.

His nose was gone; its place taken by an unfeeling stub protruding from black cheeks. His progress about the little cabin was an awkward crawl. He had no toes. He could see them yet, there on the front of his feet as he held them up to the ruddy glow of the logs crackling in a fireplace as wide as the room. They were there, and yet not there; painless lumps of black flesh, their clogged veins slowly spreading mortification along his numbed limbs. At lucid intervals a thought would strike him, set him to snarling activity. He was dying, slowly dying. The frozen gods had gotten him.

They had won through. This was the place; Clem Stewart's place. Beyond, in a quick turn of the frozen river bank, lay the countless thousands in gold that from time immemorial the summer exuberance of the Porcupine had washed down from the Rockies. In the cabin's corner was the proof of Stewart's tale; a pile of little bags laden with the precious dust. During the day, when Dornwood was away hunting, Erskine passed long hours running through his fingers the glittering, heavy sand that spelled mastery in the lands beneath the sun. From the bags he would stamp to the windows, a wild light growing ever brighter in his eyes. It was his. Stewart had died—a low chuckle would escape Erskine—died in his place. By every law it was his. He was rich. Jumbled visions of motor cars, palatial homes, soft fleshed women, trooped before the eyes of Benjamin Erskine. It was his—all his. But he was dying. The frozen gods had finished him—they waited outside now—silent, white wolves ready to leap at his throat. He would scream aloud; scream at the silence beyond the window, at the sputtering logs, the bags of gold in the corner. Loneliness, the stark and naked loneliness of the world's tip, was unbalancing the numbed mind of Benjamin Erskine.

The passing of the storm had left the man from the South more dead than alive, toes and face frozen beyond recovery. But even without his directions Dornwood had found the place. In his lucid moments this struck Erskine as queer. Dornwood was a devil. No ordinary human could do what he had done. He was a devil. The words had come to be terrifyingly real to Erskine. Why had the guide saved him through the storm, only to play with him now, as a cat with a mouse?

Erskine's hand had begun to stray, longingly, to the gun at his hip; his eyes gloated more intensely upon the gold. It was his, all his. He would not die. He could not die, now. Frozen toes, face — doctors, the best doctors in the world, would fix them up. But Dornwood knew. He must be appeased, silenced with some of the gold, *his* gold.

The wild glitter had heightened in his eyes. What need of a guide? Their back trail was clearly marked, frozen into rigid, unbroken strands clear to

where they had emerged from the storm. Past that—it would be but a few miles, keeping close to the Little Tumbler. And any story would hold good in that country. Dornwood had been lost in the blizzard. Who was to know? The hidden automatic was fondled lovingly—transferred to his shirt. Gold! His, all his. He would split with no man.

A cunning brain wove its plan through the warp of his growing weakness. That night he furtively watched Dornwood, as the guide bent to the task of cutting up the quarter of moose he had brought into the cabin. The rest of the animal, shot during the day's hunt, was outside the hut, slung to high tree branches out of reach of the famished dogs.

Erskine crouched in the corner, his eyes following every movement of the keen, bloody blade. It was a stroke of luck, the killing of that moose. It meant plenty of food for the dogs on the back trail. Erskine could hear them snarling, whimpering, just outside the wall. A shudder shook away his growing leer at thought of the gray-white, savage Muk-luk. The great lead dog was a wolf, pure and simple. They were all wolves —Dornwood, and the dogs. He had to make no slip.

He mentally repeated this, over and over, the while he occasionally cast a glance toward the entrance. From outside came a persistent scratching; a low, eager whine that finally moved Dornwood to the door, which he opened to admit Muk-luk.

WITH his peculiar, silent snarl the great husky slunk past Erskine. The man from the South shrank back, cold fingers of fear stroking along his heart. Muk-luk's eyes were queer, living fires. They told the same story as Dornwood's.

At this Erskine caught himself, wondering if he were going mad. With supreme effort he fought everything down within himself but that cunning vindictiveness which he had always relied upon in past activities. Crippled as he was, he must play safe. But the superstitious stuff — that was rot, just rot. It was cold outside, merely cold. And Dornwood was only a big man—Muk-luk just a dog.

He spoke up, his voice struggling through stiff lips.

"When we going back?"

Dornwood paused in his bloody task, and grinned.

"Spring!" His chill eyes mocked the other's startled surprise. "You'll be dead, by then."

The words shocked away Erskine's effort at self-control. "Spring?" He fairly shrieked as he struggled erect. Here was a cold cruelty that shuddered even his hardened soul. The man gave him the same consideration as the dead meat he was cutting up.

"But I hired you!" he snarled. "You're under my orders! You've got to take me back!" He stumped forward on his knees. "Dornwood, I'll give you half the gold!"

The other laughed. "What for? That's my gold. All of it, not half."

"Your gold? Hell!" Erskine forgot himself, clutched fiercely at the great shoulder. Muk-luk crouched with low, deep growl, his bared fangs gleaming in the lamp-light.

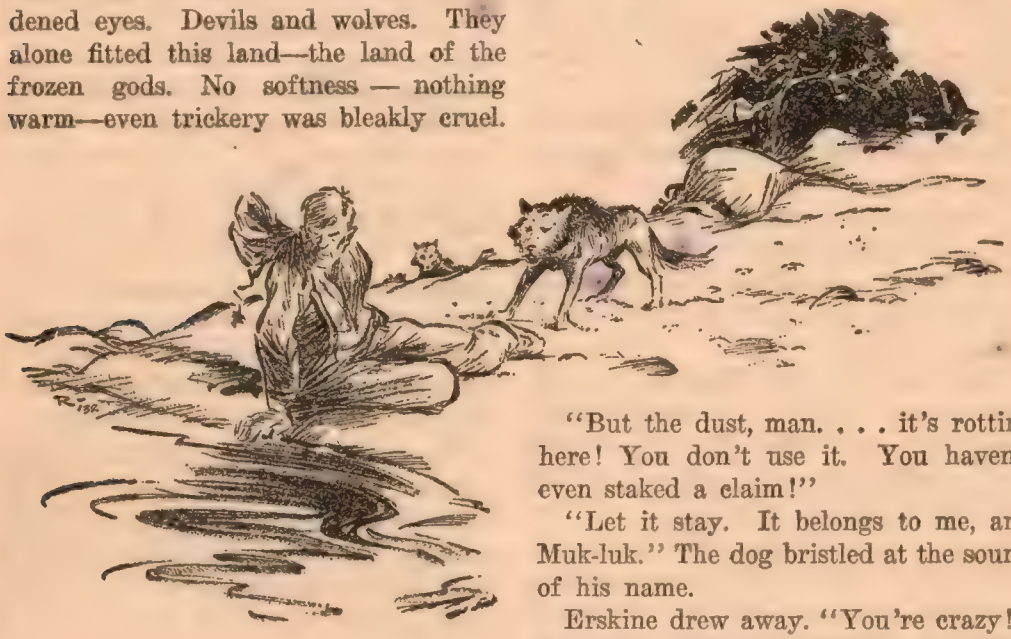
Dornwood slapped the Southland man, contemptuously, his great hand sending Erskine hurtling back to the corner. A terse command silenced the bristling dog.

"My gold!" he repeated. The bleak, freezing eyes bored Erskine. "You fool! Clem Stewart was my partner."

"Your partner?" The repeated words were dull, as if their significance was beyond the speaker's comprehen-

sion. Erskine seemed to live years, long years, as he lay half dazed in the corner.

From beyond the walls came the low, fierce snarling of the dogs. Erskine could picture them crouched in the snow hollows they had dug, or slinking with their wolfish gait beneath the high-slung moose. Gleaming fangs, cruel in the starlight; slouching, low hung bodies. Wolves! A wave of horror stole over him as he looked into Muk-luk's reddened eyes. Devils and wolves. They alone fitted this land—the land of the frozen gods. No softness — nothing warm—even trickery was bleakly cruel.



Dornwood had tricked him—for no gain. He could have told him before about Stewart. But a life meant nothing in the North, nothing to Renny Dornwood. It had been a joke to the obsessed, herculean guide, company given on the trail to his own claim.

Desperation, unheeding, flung him from the corner. The cold fingers of death were at his throat.

"Why didn't you say it? Tell me back at Fort Endurance?" He flailed weakly at the great back. "You damned wolf! Why? Why?"

Dornwood laughed, though no spark entered the bleak gray of his eyes. Again he warned down the snarling Muk-luk.

"Because all fools deserve to die. The North's gold stays in the North. And I didn't know just what you were driving at, anyway. . . . . till last night. You babble too much in your sleep." He laughed again, mirthlessly. "So that's how Clem passed out?"

Erskine ignored the question. His glaring eyes were upon the bags of gold in the farther corner.

"But the dust, man. . . . it's rotting here! You don't use it. You haven't even staked a claim!"

"Let it stay. It belongs to me, and Muk-luk." The dog bristled at the sound of his name.

Erskine drew away. "You're crazy!" he raved. "Crazy!" Wildly he looked around the little cabin, as if seeking in his tangible surroundings some escape from the nightmare world he had thrust himself into. Gradually his cunning again assumed the reins, brought a helpless pleading into his voice.

"Take me back! I don't want the gold! You can't let me die here!"

But the other did not hear the words. Erskine could see by the set of his grim face that he was listening—listening to something outside — something beyond hearing. The crippled man shuddered as he stumbled closer to the fire. Dornwood always listened to something unheard—to the silent laughter of his frozen gods.

The city man's lips began to writhe in a defiant snarl as a flood of desperation fought his growing fear. His vindictive, gutter-bred courage rose savagely against the nightmare world which encompassed him.

The frozen gods! He snarled audibly. There were no gods. Old fairy tales. His thoughts flashed to the back trail, a gleam of exultation entering his fevered eyes as he thought of the mark of the sled runners, carved rigid in the snow. Eager fingers stole up to fondle the automatic in his shirt.

Dornwood was speaking—his face still set, and showing no reason for his shifted decision.

"Don't worry, you rat; I'll take you back—tomorrow. You'll lose both legs, and part of your face — to remember some things by when you'll be under the sun again."

Erskine was silent. He could not tell, nor cared, whether Dornwood really meant his words. The oil lamp sputtered on the table, the dancing glows from the blazing logs at his side played over the pile of little yellow bags in the corner. Gold! His—all his! The queer waves of heat that had unsettled him during the day were sweeping up again, befogging his brain. The frozen gods! He laughed suddenly—aloud. Dornwood's eyes bored him. Erskine sobered.

"Tomorrow!" he agreed, then turned to smile sneeringly at the dancing flames.

THE DOGS were whining eagerly in their traces as Erskine deliberately closed his fingers around the cold butt of his automatic. It was now or never.

The Arctic dawn was still hours away toward the grayness of the south. Ghostlike the cabin stood by the banks of the frozen river—a black dot in a world of white. Dornwood was turning from the sled, striding toward where he waited by the log wall.

Benjamin Erskine sneered, and waited till the guide was within a few yards. Then deliberately, without a tremor, he jerked forth his weapon, and emptied its deadly contents into Dornwood's great form.

"Take that, damn you!"

Dornwood growled, a horrible, savage growl of surprise and agony. He lurched forward, stumbled, swayed up again toward the kneeling man before him. In the pale starlight Erskine could see the man's teeth locked—the swell of the jaw muscles as they bunched in awful effort. It was a terrible face to look upon. Wildly the killer floundered away, dragging his numbed feet. Dornwood pitched down, still growling; clawed forward. Icy fingers played along the spine of Benjamin Erskine. Here it was again—the North's illimitable strength—that would not die. A man who would not die with five bullets sent into his lungs!

He stumbled back into deep snow beyond the trampled space around the cabin door. Desperately he searched his pockets for loose cartridges, sobbing with horror as the other heaved up again, and closed the distance with clawing fingers outstretched.

The great figure caught him as he floundered helplessly on his numbed legs. He screamed in the clutch of iron hands; hands that wrenched his shoulder, closed around his throat.

Strangely, they did not tighten but fell away. Erskine slumped aside from the relaxing, huge bulk. Death had robbed Renny Dornwood of his accounting.

The man kneeling in the snow laughed hysterically. His arm was numb. Those terrible fingers had wrenched it helpless in a last spasmodic effort. But he had won. He had fooled the frozen gods. He laughed again, loudly. The mocking sound lost itself in a profound, desolate

stillness. Beyond, the dogs whimpered uneasily, the heads turned to the two dark figures outlined against the snow. At their head Muk-luk raged in impotent fury, the traces holding his lunging body. Erskine laughed again, and snarled back at the gray-white, savage leader.

Yodeling deliriously, he hobbled to the cabin. Many trips he made from the interior to the waiting sled, ignoring the numbness which was creeping past his knees. Gold! His—all his! Gold! He sang the word at each trip; gloated over the little bags. In continual wild laughter his voice shattered the silence. He had beaten the North.

The bags all on the sled, he flung himself with them, and cracked the long whip.

"Go on—mush—you damn wolves!" He sneered down at the raging Muk-luk. "I'll shoot *you* all to pieces soon as we reach the Post!" Something struck him as humorous, and he laughed again, gazing back at the cabin that seemed to be nestling down into the gray background. He shook his gloved hand, half rose in the sled; mocked the gray gloom and the weird flashes of the Aurora.

"I licked you — I licked you — easy! The frozen gods!" He laughed insanely. "Freeze—and be damned to you!" The feel of the smooth bags brought a loving croon to his blackened lips. "Mine, all mine! Mush!—you ———!"

IT WAS cold. Gradually the man's babble ebbed lower. The rasp of the sled runners split a silence profound, unutterable. He was alone in a world of gray—a weird world into which flashed the hissing Aurora bands. The dogs ran steadily; animate creatures of blood and bone, moving amidst a tumbled universe of dead and frigid matter. Queer thoughts flashed to Erskine's fevered mind. There was no other world beyond the southern rim — he was doomed to move endlessly behind the dogs over the frozen waste. There was no warmth nor softness in the world, neither women nor song. These were dreams, far, foolish dreams. There was nothing — had never been anything—but the far-reaching, illimitable grayness, faint, cold glitter of stars; mocking laughter of the twisting bands of light.

The man struggled out of his slow torpor; slapped his numbing arm violently. "Mush!" he yelled—but his voice could not rise. The first flare of exultation was gone. A thought struck him with quick, cold stab that for a moment cleared away the feverish mists from his brain. Clear before him rose the vision of the little cabin on the frozen river bank—the moose slung to the trees. Meat! The dogs! Three days to Post Desolation. Three days! The man slumped back weakly, like an emptied sack. Through the rift in his madness he saw death—stark, cold, inevitable.

Face and legs frozen, one arm useless, a helpless creature at the mercy of the North. Dornwood had been right. The North kept its gold. Visions came to him again, no longer of meat, but of the far, gasoline tainted cities where life was warm and soft. He had been somebody there, a human with friends and powers, hopes and passions. Here he was become nothing — a microscopic speck of life in an endless, gray waste. This was another world—the world of Dornwood's frozen gods. They had him. The penalty was death.

Death! No! Erskine swore wildly. They could never get him. He did not believe. "Fairy tales!" he screamed. "Fairy tales! Mush! you ——' mush!"

The long whip hissed and curled in crackling snap. Erskine could hear Muk-luk snarl. The sound brought the wild laughter back to his lips. He

crooned over the bags around him. Gold! Stewart's gold — Dornwood's! Two faces floated ahead, hovered over the gray snow. Stewart—he had killed Stewart. It was right. Stewart had been old, crippled, for certain unknown reasons would never have come back north. He had killed him—a favor to an old and half crazy man. The gold was his now—it had been there—Stewart had not lied. Erskine laughed again, wildly. But he had said no man could get that gold. He, Erskine, had gotten it.

The long whip lashed out at the bearded, ghostly face.

"You're a damn liar, Stewart — a damn liar! I got it!" The raving man chuckled. "Dornwood scared you away —Dornwood! But he can't scare me! No!"

He was standing up in the sled now, swinging at the face on the side away from Stewart — a granite, cruel-lipped face out of which swelled the muscles of jaws locked in terrible effort.

"You got yours! Got it good! No damn wolf can beat Benny Erskine. Wolves and fairy tales! That's all. Wolves and fairy tales!"

Muk-luk was snarling. The sound persisted — a blood-freezing, horrible sound of menace. It communicated uneasiness to the rest of the dogs. The sled slowed up, swerved toward the river. Erskine babbled incessantly. "Your gold, eh? Yours and Muk-luk's? Well, try and get it! Try and get it!" He was screaming at the awful set features that drifted before him.

Faint, ghostly bands of light were beginning to etch the southern horizon. The grayness was lightening, changing to pale white.

Steadily the sled rasped on. Erskine half noted the jarring cease, become smooth, steady glide. He fought long minutes with an overpowering drowsiness. Smooth—too smooth. The runner marks no longer stretched ahead. They were on the river.

He started erect, only to fall back laughing. All the better. Strange how clearly his mind worked! These men of the North were fools. The Porcupine led clear down to the Little Tumbler, an easier way. Dornwood had not taken it. Dornwood! He was back there—stiff, frozen. Frozen! Erskine tried to beat his numbing arms violently—no longer conscious of pain in his wrenched shoulder. It was cold. The frozen gods were still playing for him. Erskine laughed as he huddled crooningly among his bags of gold. He would fool them. Fool Them. All his life he would sit by a great fire, gloat over the curling tongues —and his gold.

DORNWOOD had never come up the smooth, still river—for Dornwood had known. Somewhere in the bowels of the planet subterranean fires had warmed an underground stream, a stream that broke the surface in the ice-locked North and meandered with hissing protest through frigid lands that partly cooled it in its journey down the valley of the Porcupine. Striking the main stream it coagulated, joined the rigid immobility of the white, surrounding world. But the still surface, though apparently solid, was here but a thin travesty of the ice-bound upper reaches.

It swayed beneath the spurning feet of Muk-luk and his trace mates, as they swept around the bend, crumbling beneath the weight of the sled runners. A sensation of flying shock jarred Erskine from his numb drowsiness. Water, cold, heart-stoppingly cold, flooded over him. He screamed, a muffled, choked scream —fought blindly, punching, clawing— in a burst of frantic energy dragging himself to solid ice. Painfully, gasping from his effort, he turned around.

The sled was three quarters out of

sight, with the end dog gone—the others straining madly at the taut traces. As Erskine dully watched the ice cracked sharply, gave way, engulfed another. Muk-luk and his remaining mate snarling horribly, hunched low to the terrible pull.

Benjamin Erskine stared stupidly. It was cold. He could not move. Ice locked him in an iron sheet of stiffening fur. Long moments passed, then he began again to babble, solemnly, wide eyes upon the snarling Muk-luk.

"You knew it all the time, you devil. You knew it! Your gold!" he raved. "Yours!" A great effort cracked his frozen clothes to movement, he dug past the stiffening edges of the mackenaw to bring out a long bladed skinning knife.

"You knew it. You pulled me here on purpose. But I'll get you for it!" He began to crawl toward the straining lead dog. "I'll get you!"

The grayness of the Arctic dawn still blanketed the land. From out of the North curling, weird bands of light played across the sky, a mocking panoply over the puny figure that wormed over the frozen river.

Muk-luk snapped wolfishly, his fangs clicking like a steel trap. The weight of the sled was overcoming his resistance. The ice was beginning to buckle under the feet of the dog behind. Toward them crawled Erskine, his lips tightened, a dogged purpose in his eyes. He raised himself, swung downward with the long knife.

Muk-luk slashed out at the mittened hand, lost his position of straining pull. The sled settled, and dragged down the wildly pawing animal at the lead dog's rear. A long howl rose shuddering upon the still air.

Erskine laughed mechanically, and crawled closer. Muk-luk was alone, his great, gray body writhing in effort at the ragged edge of the ice.

Again the long knife curved down, missed the furred flank—and cut cleanly through the leather trace. Like a solidified mass of gray lightning Muk-luk whirled to face the sled, and lunged back, forefeet bunched at the very edge

of the water. The shoulder bands caught at his ruff, slipped, and passed over the snarling head. The sled dipped from sight.

Benjamin Erskine blinked stupidly. It was cold. The knife slowly fell from his fingers. Cold. Over him played the hissing laughter of the Aurora. The man's head dropped down in a great resignation. Faded the memories of soft talk and softer warmth in a world far away, of Man's petty arrogances in the brief flicker of his being. He, Benny Erskine, knew at last. They had him.

Tiny, stealing fingers of ice crept in swift framework over the stretch of open water. The little bags were down there, at the bottom. Erskine smiled through a great weariness. Gold. Men fought, lied, cheated and stole for gold. And they could never get it. All men were fools, fools who could not see that they could never get it. Dornwood had thought it his—his and Muk-luk's. Even mad men were fools. Gold belonged to

none—none but the tumbling rivers and scarred mountains of Earth. Dug out of the ground—hurried in triumph to the cities, circulated, bickered over — Erskine smiled again. It was still the same gold.

With an effort he gazed down at what had once been his legs.

But men, they were not always men. The gods saw to that. He calmly swung his gaze to the gray, crouched form that waited a few feet beyond. Waiting—he knew why. Muk-luk was a wolf. And he was—meat. Erskine nodded, sagely, out of the great blackness that was engulfing him.

Muk-luk crept nearer, white fangs glinting in the slowly strengthening light. The rushing darkness edged closer about the man—shut out view of the snarling face. Feebly, he smiled again. Muk-luk would not win, no more than had he, or Dornwood.

His stiffening eyes swung for a moment up to the wavering, fading fans of brilliance that swept out of the North, then with one last, great effort he lunged toward the break in the ice. At its edge he paused, to look back at the crouching Muk-luk. A soundless laughter rose within him.

Muk-luk would lose.

A moment passed. He drew nearer the edge, sought again with his eyes that gray immensity of sky. Then Benjamin Erskine's arm swept up, essayed a strange, humble salute. His lips framed slowly the words.

"But not you. . . . . You win!"

* * *

The ice formed slowly after the splash. Above, the flaring lights seemed to hiss in triumph. Muk-luk stole forward, sniffed once at the edge, then melted away on silent feet. The frozen gods brooded alone over the white river.

The Anti-Nipper Law

ON THE statutes of Texas law there are odd ordinances, but none more strange than the anti-nipper law. In a country where men packed a couple of six-guns, where a carbine was as necessary to their equipment as a saddle and bowie knives were as common as pen knives in the east, it was a "believe it or not" law that prohibited the carrying of cutting pliers.

The law grew out of the famous Texas Fence War. When the first nestors arrived in the cattle country, ranchmen received them tolerantly, casually. They looked on their ploughs and on their herds of sheep and shrugged. The cattleman was king and why be concerned about a few plowmen or sheep herders.

But the nestor was of a hearty breed. He thrived and his numbers grew. He crowded the general stores and the bars. Even the cattle resented the sheep and refused to graze alongside of them. The cattlemen became alarmed and by right of first possession began to take measures by fencing in the water holes.

The nestors organized. Instead of guns they packed nippers and soon cattlemen were waking in the morning to find miles of fences in ruins. The nestors nipped, and nipped well, and their sheep drank deep.

The cattlemen placed their cowboys on night riding duty and the first requisite of young punchers assigned to this detail was that they be first-rate shots. Blood was spilled. Nestor and night rider suffered casualties. But still the fences fell.

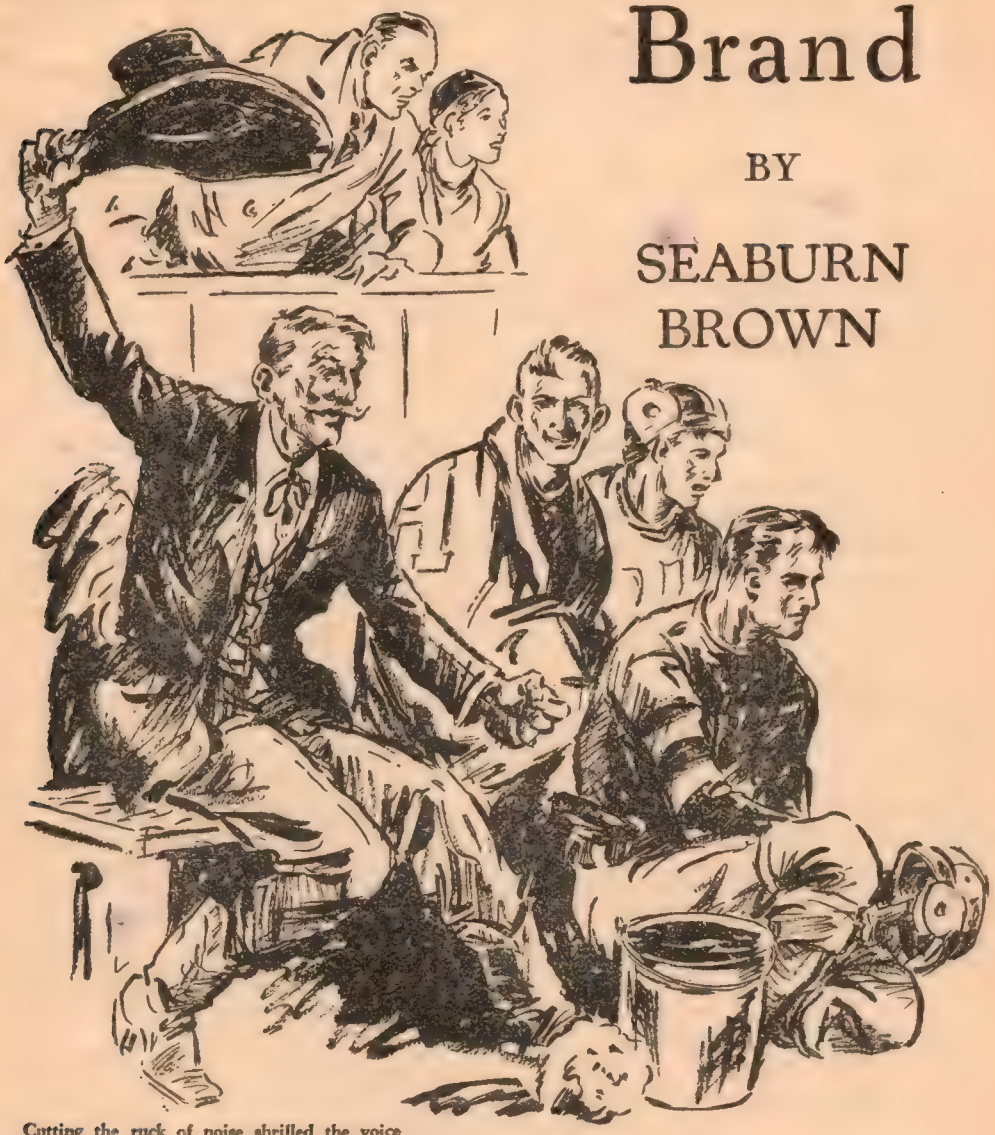
Next, the cattlemen, still powerful politically, appealed to the legislature. The law makers of the state sympathized and passed the law which made it a crime for a man to possess a pair of nippers.

THE END.

Education — Arizona Brand

BY

SEABURN BROWN



Cutting the ruck of noise shrilled the voice of old Link Farwell.
"Yip-yip, cowboy — bulldog 'im! Bulldog 'im!"

OLD LINK FARWELL heaved a sigh of such prodigious gross weight that it bowed his back and inclined his grizzled head, so that his mournful eyes strayed downward from the elk antlers fixed on the adobe wall.

The sigh gave out, and the slumping shoulders and head came to a halt at an angle which directed the melancholy eyes on something that sad eyes should not look upon; said something being the face of one Pete Coggin.

Mr. Coggin's face was commonly reported by persons of blunt speech to be the ultimate badlands of human anat-

omy. Yet old timers, who had known Mr. Coggin in his youth, averred stoutly that he was born with a reasonably normal visage, and that it might have remained so had it not been for reckless violation of the privacy of the Coggin face on the part of gentlemen addicted to Bowie knives and revolvers.

IT WAS generally accepted that a half-breed Mexican, gesturing with one of the aforesaid knives, had accounted for the major portion of Mr. Coggin's right ear. There was dispute concerning Mr. Coggin's left eye, however. Some alleged that a bullet had extinguished the orb; others that the high heel of a Panhandle outlaw had put out its blaze.

Mr. Coggin himself was in doubt.

"Ez I recollec'," he was wont to say, "thet eye wuz lost in th' shuffle durin' a bit o' hossplay in a Miles City saloon in '74. Still—I may be mistook. I git it mixed with th' time a ornery Squaw Man bit th' half-moon outer muh upper lip, which I think took place at Sidney, Nebrasker, in '75.

"But I *do* know," he would continue, brightening, "wheer I left thet inch o' skull an' got th' hole in muh temple. A hoss kicked me at Dodge City. Ye wouldn't believe it, but th' hoss broke his leg in two places. They had t' shoot 'im."

The remnants of clay housing of Mr. Coggin's durable spirit were beclouded in his old age, by gloom.

"After I got them odds an' ends trimmed off, so I wuz stripped fer action an' free o' excess ponndage, th' damned country wuz took over by hoe-men an' th' excitement died down," he would explain dejectedly. "Th' nighest thing t' gun play ye hear nowadays is th' spattin' o' a Ford's exhaust; an' t' l'arn about th' real West ye hev' t' mosey t' th' public library."

Therefore it is patent that sight of the sixty percent of Mr. Coggin's countenance still extant produced a far from salubrious effect on the dampened state of Link Farwell's mind.

"Pete," croaked Farwell, "ye've been foreman on th' LP range since shorthorn steers wuz invented."

"Yep; since before fences begun t' cramp muh rheumatism."

"What would ye do with muh son of he wuz yourn?" the ranch owner demanded suddenly.

Mr. Coggin massaged a livid scar on his neck thoughtfully.

"Well," he ventured accusingly, "he wears low-heel shoes on Sunday."

"He does," said Farwell, in the tone of one confessing a glaring blemish in his flesh and blood.

"An' he breshes his teeth twicet a day."

"True."

"An' he's nineteen year ol'—an' they's not a single piece chipped outa 'im," Mr. Coggin pursued witheringly.

"Not a piece," moaned Farwell.

"I think," declared Mr. Coggin, covering his nose with his palm, as though to hide in disgrace the only facial feature he possessed intact. "I think I'd load 'im a mess-wagon, an' give 'im a crew, an' send 'im t' Siberia. I've heered they ain't no fences there yit."

Farwell considered. "No," quoth he at last. "I wish I could; but it ain't practical. "I'll tell ye, Pete, I—" He flushed, seemingly at a loss for words. "I b'lieve th' only thing t' do is t' eddicate 'im."

Mr. Coggin was aghast.

"Ye mean t' graze 'im at one o' them there col-leges!"

"Yep—a col-lege."

"Ef ye do," Mr. Coggin predicted relentlessly, "he'll come back afflicted with a lisp an' double-grip garters—I warn ye. Them col-leges is pizen. They'd

stun a outlaw hoss so he'd drink soda pop through a straw an' crave milk with his oats!"

"Mebbe," Farwell admitted. "But it 'pears thet a cowman has t' savvy law an' such in this age, er he's up ag'in it when sheep men overrun his range, er when them fish-eyed real estate rustlers hanker fer sub-division acreage. Us cowmen's got our back t' th' wall.

"I've held out purty good with th' help o' thet hardware"—he nodded at the heavy Colt—"but th' ol' days is gone along with rubber tired buggies. Now all th' shootin' is done with lawyers' mouths in courtrooms. Muh boy Jupe has got t' be equipped t' take keer o' hisself an' th' ranch."

"Th' high school nigh ruin't 'im," Mr. Coggin deprecated. "He knows more 'bout th' ancient Romins an' Pennsylvanians than he does o' th' Dalton gang, which ain't natcheral. Like ez not, he'll sell th' ranch after he gits eddicated an' become a perfesser o' gee-ology er gosh-ology er some other tarnal *ology.*"

"Not muh boy Jupe," was the resentful retort. "Th' West is in his blood."

JUPITER FARWELL stepped from a train and looked curiously about. It was his first vision of a city east of the Mississippi; and the atmosphere of entrenched quiet which pervaded the typical college in which he found himself awed him.

The quiet was short lived. He was one of many prospective students to descend from the sultry day coach. All at once broke loose a crescendo of yells and a horde of sophomores stormed the station platform.

"Blazin' buffalo grass!" burst out Jupiter. "Must be a rodeo in town!"

No one heard him in the din of battle. The sophomores, bent on nipping freshman enthusiasm by prompt hazing, triumphed speedily in the power of numerical superiority.

Young Farwell, accustomed to take the initiative in emergencies, dropped his grip and converted his rangy body into a slashing unit of fighting machinery that felled three or four of the foremost attackers.

Whooping riotously for reinforcements, they charged again, bearing Jupiter to the ground by sheer momentum. Several assailants limped from the zone of fury before the western freshman was reduced to a state of dizzy quiescence.

This accomplished, his conquerors left him and joined the assault on the main body of newcomers—all but two. This pair exchanged knowing glances.

"He'll do, Fred," panted one.

"I'll say!" cried the second. "My car's parked in the next block. Let's drive to the house with him."

Events of the ensuing ten minutes were cobwebby in Jupiter's punch-drunk head. He was hustled into a flivver and transported at perilous speed to a roomy, square building removed from the paved street by the space of a broad lawn, and surrounded by giant spreading oaks.

Jupiter's captors howled at a group of boys lounging on the wide veranda, and these rushed to the car and aided in dragging the prisoner across the lawn and into a vast, cool room.

Further resistance was fruitless, and Jupiter suffered them to deposit him in a mohair armchair and gather around to scrutinize his dust-begrimed features and rent-decorated suit.

The boys jabbered unintelligibly; then one of them, a huge, bull-necked fellow with a good natured expression, confronted Jupiter and assumed the office of inquisitor.

"Where's your home?"

"LP ranch, Arizona." Jupiter's an-

swer was clothed in a western drawl, soft as the burr of a quail's wings, and somewhat modified by the training of an earnest high school English teacher.

"What are you here for?"

"To get the drop on a brainful of law."

"Good! You'll stay four years, then?"

"I reckon."

"Ever play football?"

"Nope."

"Hell!" The big boy spun on his heel. "Take him back where you got him, you birds. He's a dud."

"A dud!" bellowed one of the students who had brought the westerner. "You wouldn't call that guy a dud if he cracked you the way he did us! What if he doesn't know football? Dempsey didn't know as much boxing as Jack Sharkey, either; but he rung up the fare to a date with Gene Tunney, just the same. This specimen's got the old wallop—he'll learn the game, and he'll hit the line like he hit a baker's dozen of chins.

"Our fraternity hasn't owned a first team regular except you for three years. We grabbed this man so we could line him up to join us before the rest of the frats get wise to him.

"What's your name?"

"Jupiter Farwell—Jupe for short."

"Well, Jupe, wouldn't you like to play football for your college? The coach'll grind it into your system."

"I might try," Jupiter said dubiously. "I can do more, maybe, when your rodeo comes off. I'll climb the best nags you have—and I never pulled leather yet."

To his honor, the substitute questioner repressed a grin.

"We're too far east, I'm afraid. No rodeos or roundups. Football is the main idea with us."

"Jake with me," Jupiter promised. "I packed a full outfit in my trunk—a lariat and the keenest saddle you ever saw."

"All you require for football," said the sophomore, "is the strength in those arms and legs of yours and the heart to absorb a pounding every afternoon for three months."

Jupiter smiled.

"Stay for dinner?" invited the questioner.

"Sure thing."

YOUNG FARWELL, newly-initiated member of the fraternity that had claimed him by right of conquest, and candidate for fullback on the Caseton college varsity, left off hurling his sinewy bulk at the bucking machine and trotted obediently in response to the coach's summons.

"Jupe, you've been drilled a solid ten days in football fundamentals. I want to see if you can utilize all the blocking, tackling and ball-carrying dope we've poured in. Shoot out and take Spelger's place in scrimmage."

Jupiter loped to the middle of the field and tapped Spelger—the big fellow who had termed him a dub, and the fullback regular—on the shoulder.

"The foreman wants me to gallop a little."

"Right-o," returned Spelger. "I'm all in, anyway; it's hell the way the summer fat hangs to a guy."

Jupiter was given the ball on the first play. The coach frowned when he was stopped at the line. On his second attempt a burly end threw the western boy for a yard loss.

"Follow your interference, kiddo; hit the hole the signal calls for," the quarterback admonished the novice.

Smarting under the sting of rebuke, Jupiter plunged desperately—and according to plan—in his third try. It was an off tackle buck. The narrow hole opened for his passage by the offensive linemen snapped shut as he reached it.

A *thud* of colliding flesh sounded dully. The cowboy staggered.

A hoarse shout was wrung from the coach; for Jupiter, shaking off tacklers as a maddened bull shakes off wolves, regained his balance and spurted clear of the scrimmage tangle into open field

Behind him, so close that he sprinted in Jupiter's shadow, a lithe halfback sprang in pursuit.

"Dod'll catch him. He's the fastest man on the squad," the coach remarked to Spelger. "The kid broke through nice, though—"

"Hell's bells!—lookit him ramble!" Spelger clutched the coach's arm. "He's gaining! Damn me, he's running away from Dod!"

Jupiter flashed into the shadow of the goal posts in the lead—shadow and all.

The coach ran to Dod. "Did he run away from you on the level, Dod? Are your legs right?"

"Right as a T-square, Mr. Lancet; I never sprinted faster in my life. Jupe's a speed demon."

"He's a find," Lancet exulted. "The fastest devil I've set eyes on; and I've coached twenty years. Hey, you, Jupe—the other team's taking the ball now. Look sharp and show as much stuff on defense!"

At sundown Lancet called off practice a greatly puzzled man.

"Jupe's too many for me," the coach said plaintively to Spelger. "A phenom, a combined greased pig and greyhound on offense—a terrible flop on defense. Why *can't* he tackle?"

"Search me, coach. He overhauls every man that runs inside a rod of him; but he can't bring 'em down."

"And he won't tackle low," Lancet grumbled. "I showed him, railed at him, demonstrated for him—a solid thirty minutes. He listened—and made the same fool necktie tackles over and over; too high for effectiveness."

Part of a letter written to his father by Jupiter that night would have enlightened the coach, could he have read it:

"Football's a lot of sport, long as your own side has the ball," Jupiter wrote. "It's no fun at all when the other side has it. It's like enjoying the thrill of riding a new bronco—then put-

ting the saddle on yourself and permitting the horse to ride you."

Old man Farwell recited the letter to Mr. Coggin, who sniffed pessimistically.

"Th' life's gittin' th' lad," he gloomed. "Th' idee—him wearin' stockin's t' play thet fool game. I eemagine when he gits home he'll want a sep'rate fork fer his pie. I seen a maverick frum New York oncet who wuz so short o' sense he didn't tuck his napkin in th' top o' his shirt; left it on his knees where it couldn't do no good when his mouth leaked, ez mouths will. He burnt his mouth with coffee when he wuz in a hurry b'cause he never l'arned 'nough t' drink out o' a saucer. Th' eddication them strays has ain't—"

"There ain't a word on th' law study," cut in the rancher. "Mebbe they l'arn thet in them football classics."

"Th' law what done this country good," asserted Mr. Coggin, "had nothin' t' do with stockins—sox neither. T' win yer case ye wuz concerned with elevatin' boots, with feet in 'em, by means o' a rope an' cottonwood tree. They called this God's country b'cause he knew what it needed; no matter how sparse th' timber might be, they wuz always a cottonwood with limbs high up when ye needed one, wherever ye wuz. Now we're cuttin' down th' cottonwoods an' importin' at-torneys. What good is stockin'-law fer a boot-law country?"

Farwell grunted noncommittally.

COACH LANCET, being endowed with what Mr. Coggin would have expressed as "parts an' compunctions," solved intelligently the problem involved in Jupiter's helplessness on defense.

Spelger was adapted to purely defensive work. Jupiter, to his joy, scrimmaged exclusively with the team on offense.

The pre-conference tilts against weak set-ups established Lancet's solution as feasible. When opponents were on the run, and a scintillating assault necessary, Jupiter replaced Spelger. Conversely, when the Caseton goal was threatened, and a stiffened defense imperative, Spelger replaced Jupiter.

Mentor and men were happy. Lancet was acclaimed as a master mind at utilizing to best advantage the strength of his squad; and the two fullbacks, instead of being rivals, were impartially worshipped by undergraduates and alumni.

* * *

George Spelger and Jupiter Farwell stood at either end of the long fireplace and conversed in low tones, meanwhile striving to appear unconscious of the keen adulation shining in the faces of their Greek letter brethren.

It was the eve of the season's "big game" with the formidable State College eleven.

"They're tough," Spelger commented; "but we'll take 'em. Why look so downhearted about it?"

"I'm not worrying about the Staters," Jupiter returned testily. "I—I—it's my dad."

"What's wrong—he sick?"

"No . . . . But—well, he's spending money to keep me here for the purpose of studying law; his heart's set on it. And I'm—flunking. That's the only word for it."

"Oh, it can't be as bad as that," Spelger said cheerily. "You can't flunk till the final exams are taken, you know."

Jupiter sighed. "My grades so far this semester are so low I'd have to make an impossible showing—better than perfect—in the final to average a passing mark. I've as good as flunked."

"Don't you like law, Jupe?"

"I hate the stuff! All I've cared for

here is football—you know that. It's all I've made good in."

Spelger whistled.

Jupiter started to speak. Spelger was startled to see his face go white, then red.

"Dad!" cried the western boy. "Dad!"

Old Link Farwell, amused at the astonishment wrought by his unexpected arrival, smiled broadly from the far end of the great room. He dropped his heavy, cowhide bag, which was deftly caught by a freshman on social duty before it could reach the carpet.

"Howdy, Son!" Hand outstretched, he negotiated the floor in the rolling, short strides of the saddle-born ranchman.

Jupiter leaped to meet him; and for a time Link Farwell was the crux of an explosive hubbub. Every student on the premises elbowed in to be introduced to a genuine denizen of the cow country. They were disappointed solely in the—to them—surprising circumstance that he carried no notch-handled firearms and was totally devoid of leather chaps.

By dint of main strength Jupiter freed his sire from the press and dragged him to his room.

"Now we can talk, Dad," he puffed, locking the door.

A drumfire of small talk brought out that Farwell had brought a shipment of eight hundred head of cattle to Chicago and continued east to spend a week-end with the 'yearlin'."

When the conversation had simmered to the point of short silences, the old man veered to the topic Jupiter dreaded.

"This here football may be all right, Son. But th' law, now; I expected different. I been talkin' with——"

A battering at the door gave Farwell pause.

Jupiter's heart seemed to swell into his throat and strangle him. . . His dad had been to the dean. . . .

"Go on, Dad; I'm listening."

"This here brain range is stocked plentiful with noise, ain't it? Well, 'bout th' law I sent ye t' study, I been talkin'——"

The knocking increased in vigor and was supplemented with a strident demand:

"You there, Jupe?"

"Yes, I'm here—beat it!"

"Say—open up. This is Lancet."

Chagrined, Jupiter hastened to turn the key.

"Excuse me, Mr. Lancet: I didn't recognize your voice. Meet my father; just in from the West."

"Howdy," said Farwell.

"Mighty glad to know you," said the coach, cordial but breathless. "Sorry to intrude and be in such a rush—can't stay. But here, young man"—whirling upon Jupiter—"you turn over your father to boys who don't play football for tonight. You were to be in bed by 9 o'clock; it's 10:10. I'm making the rounds to insure that every mother's son of you gets a load of sleep tonight, so there'll be no napping on the field tomorrow."

"Thet's sense ye're talkin', mister. I'll canter down the stairs with ye; then ye won't waste no more worry on this colt o' yer string."

"Dad!"

"Weight down yer bunk, Son. We'll palaver after th' spurs is socked t' thet football."

The door was closed, and Jupiter left with uncompanionable thoughts.

At the foot of the stairs Farwell spoke bluntly:

"Football's int'restin', I s'pose, mister; an' I admire t' know thet my kid can ride th' range proper. But I never sent him here t' play no games. I tol' 'im t' l'arn law, an' now—"

"You must pardon me, Mr. Farwell. I don't mean to be rude. I'm in a rush lot of ground to cover. I have nothing to do with your son's shortcomings in scholastic work; my province is limited to football."

"Go right ahead," said the rancher good-humoredly. "I fergot ye got some night ridin' t' do. Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Farwell."

LANCET entered the dressing room, a crypt-like compartment built under an end of the concrete stadium.

"Come on, boys," he directed crisply. "Game starts in ten minutes. Get out and limber up."

Howling deliriously, three score grid warriors milled through the doorway and, to the accompaniment of frantic cheering from the rooting section, scattered over the field—hurling footballs, kicking footballs, shrieking mutual encouragement.

Lancet shouted in Jupiter's ear:

"Got a surprise for you, Jupe. Your dad'll watch you from the bench with me."

A forced smile shielded Jupiter's agitation. No matter what his fortune in the game, a bitter blow was reserved for his father's pride. Failure in any endeavor was unthinkable to a Farwell; and already Jupiter had failed beyond redemption.

On impulse Jupiter left the field and approached the bench. Better to face the music before the first play, he thought, and enter the fray with a clearer mind.

Lancet frustrated his design.

"We don't need you on the sideline, Jupe—I'm starting you first quarter. Skin out and warm up."

"Dad," Jupiter blurted desperately, "I want to say—"

Link Farwell rose from his seat next the coach.

"Ef a cowboy on my place didn't hop when th' foreman yapped, I'd run 'im off th' ranch, Son. Git out there like Mr. Lancet says. Ye can say all ye want t' me after it's over—an' I got a buffalo gun load t' spiel myself."

Seething inwardly, Jupiter turned away. In signal drill he ran as viciously as if a 200-pound line opposed him.

The initial five minutes of the first quarter justified Lancet's crafty battle plan.

Trick plays, constructed around the cowboy fullback's dazzling speed, disorganized the Staters temporarily; and they rallied too late to stem his rapier thrusts. In half a dozen plays—reverses, fake reverses and spin plays—he crossed the line.

"I knew he'd do it!" Lancet raved, banging the gaping cowman on his broad back. "We got the jump on 'em! A first quarter touchdown half wins any game!"

"Fumin' bob-cats!" responded Farwell elegantly. "I never seen th' like o' thet. Say—them eastern kids ain't so soft ez I thought they wuz. My Stetson's off to 'em!"

Jupiter's accurate toe booted the pigskin over the crossbar for the extra point; and Caseton kicked off with the score 7 to 0 in their favor.

The State College representatives returned the ball to the thirty-yard line. Fighting doggedly, they gained first down on three terrific line smashes. With the oval on their own forty-yard line, the visitors essayed a forward pass.

Describing a twenty-yard arch, the ball dropped safely into the arms of a State end, who stiff-armed a would-be tackler and set off like a streak toward the Caseton goal line.

The tumult that rocked the stands at the play swelled deafeningly as Jupiter, racing in pursuit, caught up to the runner a scant five yards from the goal.

But the magnificent run went for naught. Jupiter's tendency to tackle clumsily cropped out. His arms closed on the runner's neck, and the latter, sobbing with the strain, dragged Jupiter with him across the chalk-marked boundary.

"Well," Farwell detonated. "I'm damned!"

Lancet, trembling with rage, tapped Spelger on the arm. "Take the fool's place," he spat.

Jupiter, refraining from looking at his father or the coach, sank on the bench and stared stonily at the ground.

THE STATERS failed to convert for the extra point; and the half ended and the evenly-matched teams seesawed within the twenty-yard lines until early in the fourth quarter with the score at 7 to 6 for Caseton.

Then State, working the ball yard by yard to Caseton's thirty-five yard mark, executed a perfect dropkick to take the lead, 9 to 7.

A glance at his watch beaded Lancet's forehead with the sweat of agony. But six minutes of play remained, and his entry trailed.

Wearily the teams lined up for the kickoff, Caseton to receive.

Hopelessly the coach called to Jupiter.

"You lost the game for us with grammar school tackling. Go in and try to win it back; do the one thing you can do—carry that ball!"

And Jupiter carried it. Play after play — ten yards—eight yards—fifteen yards—consistent, brilliant gains; now skirting the ends; now darting through a hole that yawned and filled quickly as water closes its surface when a stone is pitched into a lake.

The last play, a sparkling exhibition of broken-field running, took the oval into the coveted area behind the spidery uprights.

Lancet conceded a wry smile when old Link Farwell shifted his cud, spat reflectively, and opined:

"Well, partner—he raked th' bacon outer the fire."

"Which squares cases," replied the coach. "For he won't have a second chance to let a runner by him, take it from me. If our goal's endangered

again—out he comes before the damage is done."

"Thet," agreed Farwell, "is hoss sense."

With scarcely a minute to play, Caseton received State's kickoff. Roused to supernormal effort the State ends tore down the field at a pace that downed Jupiter, who returned the ball, on Caseton's twenty-five yard line.

"Thirty seconds to go!" ejaculated Lancet in relief. "They'll kick out of danger and the game'll be over — and won. No time now for a counter drive."

Heffernon, halfback and Caseton's punting reliable, dropped back and applied his powerful toe to the ball—and in a twinkling the situation altered disastrously for Caseton.

The fleet State quarter broke through

the line and leaped high before Heffernon. The kick was blocked. The ball struck the quarterback full on the chest, rebounding in the air. Down it looped into a whirlpool of clawing gridders.

Lancet, springing upon the bench, cursed with a lattitude, longitude and fluency that elicited admiration from so capable a critic as Link Farwell.

Out of the snarl of players spurted the State quarter, hugging the ball. Straight at the sideline he raced, swerved cunningly, and fairly flew toward the goal line.

His maneuver distanced all opposition —save that of Jupiter who, running diagonally, put on a burst of speed which brought him nearly abreast of the State man with the latter three strides from victory.

The power to swear deserted Lancet: His fullback engineered the old, faulty tackle and launched himself high, hands outstretched for the runner's neck.

But someone else found voice.

Cutting the ruck of noise as a knife cuts a cheese shrilled the voice of old Link Farwell.

"Yip-yip, cowboy—bulldog 'im! Bulldog 'im!"

In midair a magical muscular convulsion galvanized Jupiter. His legs spread as if seeking a foothold for leverage in some invisible substance. Instead of grasping the quarterback's neck with his hands, he passed them around the ball carrier's head, interlocked the fingers, pressed the forearms against his head, and wrenched sidewise violently.

The Stater's feet left the ground. Tackler and man crashed as one. Cleats ripped clods from the spotty turf as the Stater threshed spasmodically and vainly for freedom. His eyes bulged from the constriction.... a pistol cracked, ending the combat.

"Man! I never saw anything like it!" Lancet gasped. It was unearthly."

"Naw; it wuz earthly ez fertilizer," contradicted Farwell. "Ain't ye never seen a cowboy throw a steer, mister? We call it bulldoggin'. Th' boy didn't do nothin' re-markable. A cowboy wuth his salt can grab a steer by th' ho'ns an' flop 'im. The kid just had to be tol'."

LINK FARWELL lit a virile cigar. "I waited, Jupe, fer ye t' change clothes an' git cooled off t' have this pow-wow. I sure don't like t' hurt ye; but I'm plumb disgusted with yer law study. I'm goin' t' take ye out o' college."

Jupiter gulped. "I'm glad to leave, Dad. But I have no excuse that will hold water."

"I been talkin' with—"

"Yes—I know, Dad; the dean. He spilled the truth, no doubt."

"Th' dean? Dean who? I don't know th' guy. I been talkin' with Coggin, and he——"

"Then how'd you know I flunked law?"

"What does 'flunked' mean in Arizona language?"

"It means I haven't studied enough to get my grade."

"Ye ain't l'arned no law, Son?"

"Not to speak of. It was rotten in me, I——"

"Ain't thet swell! Coggin wuz afeared ye had 'nough o' it corralled t' be a justice o' th' peace. Boy, I'm glad t' hear ye say thet!

"Ye see, I wuz all wrong on muh idee —plumb loco. I had thet fool notion ye needed law t' help ye in th' cattle bizness. Coggin never did think so; an' he's purty smart, though he ain't got 'nough face t' indercate it.

"Anyway, we been arguin' back an' forth on th' subject since ye left. Two weeks ago we got it settled.

"A brace o' wise guys o' the East dropped in an' fenced off a fo'ty-acre

strip o' our best grassland. I give 'em notice t' vamoose pronto. They rammed a legal paper o' some sort under muh snoot an' claimed it showed they'd got holt o' a prior right, er some such damned thing, from some party I hadn't heard tell on, who they said had owned th' tract fifty year back.

"Well, I got me a lawyer—a good one. 'They're crooks,' he told me; 'but they're slick. Mebbe we can beat 'em; but it'll take a long time—possibly years.' I ast 'im what it'd cost me. Th' fee he set wuz more than th' land is wuth.

"Coggin sipped th' news into his workin' ear. Next day he saddled a pony an' paid a visit t' th' trespassers. He come back with his gun empty.

" 'Them birds,' he says, 'has flew, is still flyin', and will continue t' flow. Now what d'ye think o' yer law?'

" 'It ain't much ag'in a Colt which has a cylinder an' bar'el 'stead o' laigs an' a tail,' I confesses.

" 'Then,' says Coggin, 'ye better strike east an' rope yer offspring outer thet school before he l'arns law an' gits sp'iled hopeless'."

Jupiter breathed freely for the first time in weeks.

"Dad, I've ached for home since I got off the train here. Football's all they can show to interest me; and one steer-tossing trick upset the whole shebang! Let's start for the ranch in the morning."

THE SAD Mr. Coggin greeted the returning prodigal with characteristic somberness. Haughtily he outthrust his nose for inspection.

"While ye wuz fritterin' yer time, young man, I wuz completin' muh personal record o' frontier hist'ry. Ye'll recall thet this nose wuz disgracefully entire."

Jupiter eyed respectfully the olfactory organ. Its tip was missing.

" 'Two-gun' Archie done thet on th' first shot o' a careless trade o' salutes. Ez a result o' th' second shot, Archie has been gathered t' his forebears."

Jupiter drew himself to his full height and said with dignity:

"Coggin, behold!" He parted his hair with eager fingers, exposing a white scar. "Football did that."

"Do tell!" Mr. Coggin actually smiled. "Now, thet's a real noble commencement. I'll hand thet football credit fer breakin' ye t' lead by halter; but I guess it's up t' yer pap an' me t' saddle up an' really eddicate ye."

"I guess it is," beamed Jupiter.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

ONE ON YOU, ZEUS!

A Complete Novel By

HUGH B. CAVE

ROMAN HOLIDAY

A HUMOROUS STORY BY

RALPH CUMMINS

LAST CHANCE

ALL FOR 99¢ PLUS POSTAGE

Most Amazing Offer Ever Made to American Women. The ten articles shown below all would cost $8.00 if bought separately at retail price. Every article regular store size. You get all for Coupon and 99¢, Plus Postage.

$1 One box VIVIDON EXCEPTIONAL FACE POWDER. A natural blending powder for day use.

$1 One large size waterproof VIVIDON ROUGE CREME. A new creation, greater living color with the greatest naturalness.

$1 One full size artistic bottle VIVIDON PERFUME. A rich bouquet fragrance, good for business frock or evening gown. Full ounce. Generous bottle included with your makeup set.

75¢ One large VIVIDON WAVE SET. Refreshing and invigorating, adds exquisiteness to the hair. There is a bottle in your makeup set.

$1 One large size VIVIDON BEAUTY CREAM. A marvelous preparation; many women have and will pay $1 per jar for this fine beauty cream. Included in your makeup set.

75¢ One large size VIVIDON SHAMPOO. A pure crystal green liquid in a shapely bottle of graceful design. It immediately gives a sense of supreme hair comfort.

75¢ One large size VIVIDON BATH SALT. Rich lavender colors, delightfully perfumed, in unique ovalistic bottle. An added pleasure for the bath.

50¢ One bottle VIVIDON EYE-LASH BEAUTIFIER. Dainty bottle with ready applicator for the lashes—with your makeup set.

75¢ One large size VIVIDON BRILLIANTINE. Decidedly excellent for retaining the wave. VIVIDON BRILLIANTINE is fragrant and adds much lustre to the hair.

50¢ Bottle VIVIDON NAIL ENAMEL. Will finish your nails to a transparent waterproof rose color.

SEND NO MONEY
JUST MAIL COUPON TODAY

Coupon for one VIVIDON Makeup Set

VIVIDON CO., Dept. 153
402 Van Nest Ave., New York, N.Y.

Send me one VIVIDON Makeup Set as illustrated above. I will pay postman 99¢ plus postage.

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

...Raised His Pay $4800* After Reading This Amazing Book Which Is Now *FREE!*

*Based on the combined experience of F. B. Englehardt, Chattanooga, Tenn., A. C. Wallahan, Huron, S. Dak., L. Van Houten, Grand Rapids, Mich., and many others.

Caught in a Rut

I wonder I put up with it as long as I did! Every day was filled with nothing but deadly routine and monotonous detail. No freedom or independence. No chance to get out and meet people, travel, nor have interesting experiences. I was just like a cog in a big machine with poor prospects of ever being anything more.

Long, Tiresome Hours

Every hour of the day I was under somebody's supervision. The TIME-CLOCK constantly laid in wait for me—a monument to unfulfilled hopes and dying ambition. Four times a day, promptly on the dot, it hurled its silent challenge at my self-respect, reminding me how unimportant I was and how little I really COUNTED in the business and social world!

Low Pay

Paid just enough to keep going—but never enough to enjoy any of the GOOD things of life every man DESERVES for his family and himself. Always economizing and pinching pennies. Always wondering what I would do if I were laid off or lost my job. Always uncertain and apprehensive of the future.

Desperate

Happened to get a look at the payroll one day and was astonished to see what big salaries went to the sales force. Found that salesman Brown made $200 a week—and Jenkins $275! Would have given my right arm to make money that fast, but never dreamed I had any "gift" for salesmanship.

A Ray of Light

Stumbled across an article on salesmanship in a magazine that evening. Was surprised to discover that salesmen were made and not "born" as I had foolishly believed. Read about a former cowpuncher, Wm. Shore of California, making $525 in one week after learning the ins-and-outs of scientific salesmanship. Decided that if HE could do it, so could I!

The Turning Point

My first step was to write for a certain little book which a famous business genius has called "The MOST AMAZING BOOK EVER PRINTED". It wasn't a very *big* book, but it certainly opened my eyes to things I had never *dreamed* of—and proved the turning point of my entire career!

What I Discovered

Between the pages of this remarkable volume, I discovered hundreds of little known facts and secrets that revealed the REAL TRUTH about the science of selling! It wasn't a bit as I had imagined. I found out that it was governed by simple rules and laws that almost ANY man can master as easily as he learned the alphabet. I even learned how to go about getting into this "highest paid of all professions". I found out exactly how Mark Barichievich of San Francisco was enabled to quit his $8 a week job as a restaurant-worker and start making $125 a week as a salesman; and how C. W. Birmingham of Dayton, Ohio, jumped from $15 a week to $7500 a year—these and *hundreds* of others! It certainly *was* a revelation!

FREE Employment Service

Furthermore, I discovered that the National Salesmen's Training Association, which published the book, also operates a most effective employment service! Last year they received requests from all over the U. S. and Canada for more than 50,000 salesmen trained by their method. This service is FREE to both members and employers and thousands have secured positions this way!

Making Good At Last!

It didn't take me long to decide to cast my lot with N. S. T. A.—and after a few weeks I had mastered the secrets of Modern Salesmanship during spare time, without losing a day or a dollar from my old job. When I was ready, the Employment Manager found me over a dozen good openings to choose from—and I selected one which paid me over $70 a week to start!

Was It Worth It?

Today my salary is $4800 greater than ever before! No more punching time-clocks or worrying over dimes and quarters! NOW my services are in REAL DEMAND with bigger prospects for the future than I ever dared HOPE for back in those days when I was just another "name" on a pay-roll!

Get Your Copy FREE

Right now the book—"The Key to Master Salesmanship" which banished all my fears and troubles and showed me how to get started on the road to success and independence—will be mailed as a gift to any ambitious man, absolutely **FREE.** And since there is no obligation, why not see for yourself what amazing facts it contains! Just mail the coupon now—for there is no better way in the world to invest a 2-cent stamp—I KNOW! **NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSN., Dept. M 1155, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Illinois.**

National Salesmen's Training Assn., Dept. M 1155, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Without obligation, please send me a free copy of "The Key to Master Salesmanship," and other details of N. S. T. A. service.

Name ..... Address.....

Town ..... State.....

Age..... Occupation .....

MEND the HOLE for 1 CENT

PATENTS IN U.S. AND FOREIGN COUNTRIES PENDING

—with Amazing SAVASOLE

Registered U. S. Patent Office

See this amazing "plastic" shoe repairing discovery that ends costly half soling forever. Mends a hole for 1 cent. Or covers an entire new sole for a few cents with a complete, new, tough, flexible, long wearing waterproof surface. Just spread Savasole on with an old knife. Dries hard over-night. Wears like leather. Makes "worn out" shoes like new—makes them wear months and wears longer. Saves buying new shoes. Agents and distributors cleaning up with this sensational "hard times" specialty. Mail coupon for FREE Sample on leather and big money-making offer for agents and distributors.

Fix Tires with SAVASOLE
—also Auto Tops

Savasole has hundreds of uses in the home, factory, store or garage. Repairs any leather, rubber or cloth article—cheap, easy, quick, economical, satisfactory.

AGENTS Earn up to $42 a Day

Naturally, everybody is a customer for this amazing invention, which has scores of uses in EVERY household. Big margin of profit on quick, easy sales. Lewis sold over twenty thousand dollars worth of Savasole. Kimura just got $500 Cash Bonus IN ADDITION to his splendid earnings. Elford buys in 10-gross lots. Morrill, Pim, Baker and scores of others earning more money than they ever made before. Schools, police departments, state and city governments—all kinds of institutions buy in big quantities from Savasole distributors. Army officers endorse—and buy—Savasole. Savasole is a marvelous "hard times" item. The poorer people are the more they need to SAVE money. And every set of SAVASOLE, costing the customer 50c to $1.50, saves from $5.00 to $50.00 in repairs and purchases of new shoes, boots, and other articles.

ACT AT ONCE

Desirable territories being "snapped up" by hustlers. Plenty of good districts still open. Get yours NOW! We show you how to make quick convincing demonstrations that amaze customers and get the orders. You can start spare time. Every family needs Savasole. Repeat business everywhere. Rush coupon now for Free Sample on leather and special starting offer.

SAVASOLE COMPANY
J-162 Daylight Bldg. Cincinnati, Ohio

Mail for FREE Sample

R. R. Bollman, Pres.
SAVASOLE COMPANY
J-162 Daylight Bldg.
Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Mr. Bollman: Please send me FREE Sample of SAVASOLE on leather, your generous starting offer, and explain how I can earn up to $42 on your exclusive territory plan. Send everything FREE and without obligation.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Territory .....